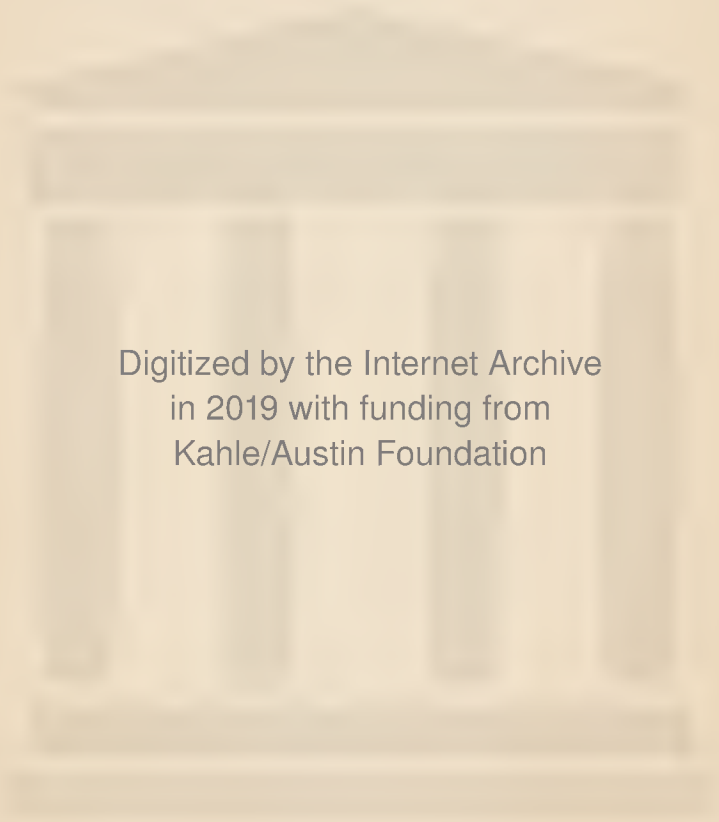
My Reminiscences as a Cowboy

Frank Harris

Charles Boni PAPER BOOKS *New York*



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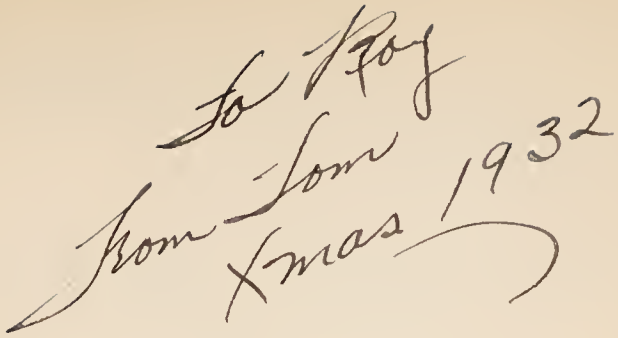

MY REMINISCENCES AS A COWBOY

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☆ FRANK HARRIS ☆

ILLUSTRATIONS
BY
WILLIAM GROPPER

1930
Charles Boni PAPER BOOKS *New York*

MY REMINISCENCES AS A COWBOY

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INTRODUCTION

To the generation of 1930, Frank Harris is already a legend. At seventy-five he sits on his balcony by the still Mediterranean waters and remembers his youth. To us, to whom he reveals with the assurance of an eyewitness so many of last century's men of light and leading, this youth appears all business and discourse with personages whose stories are now a part of history—personages like Emerson and Whitman and Carlyle and Ruskin and Whistler, like King Edward and Debs and Bismarck. Others of the Harris gallery are still with us. They were young when he was young, and of one fellowship with him in labor and aspiration. Among these, he names three, Galsworthy and Wells and Shaw, who are still the giants of the world of letters, each in the winter of his life eager about the human future to the end of time. But Harris remembers his youth, and it seems to him golden. Maybe it is because he had a youth as these men had not, a youth wherein the reality was as the boy's dream, and the dream as the reality.

It was a youth upon the American prairie, among the cowboys and Indians and buffalo-herds of the '70's, by its mere

conditions compact with adventure and tense with high emotion. No wonder Harris can say of it: "Kings and cowboys I have known, and the cowboys stand out above the rest. I am six thousand miles from them at this moment and fifty-six years in time, but they seem nearer to me than this morning's newspaper." No wonder Wild Bill Hicock retains his glamour, in memory a shining figure of epic greatness. "I've never known Wild Bill as I've known Bernard Shaw or Oscar Wilde or a hundred of the most important men in art, literature and politics in Europe and America, but Wild Bill remains a hero to me still. Indeed, I have only three heroes, Wild Bill, Shakespeare and Cervantes—all dead."

His heroes reveal the heart of Frank Harris. Together they incarnate the image of his deep desire: the scout and savior of the wildernesses with his instant resource, his infallible swift aim, and his kind good heart; the poet spokesman of the human soul; the pitiful laughing judge of its wild aspirations and its visionless grubbings. And of the three it is the image of Wild Bill that in his old age moves Frank Harris most. It is to the scenes where he knew that hero that his heart returns. It is his life amid these scenes that the present book recounts.

This life has been little known. It has not entered into the legend of Frank Harris. In the legend he figures as the man of letters solely, the friend and companion of greatness, the revealer of the soul of Oscar Wilde, the painter of a hundred other souls, his contemporaries. But before he was these things, he was a cowboy on our western plains. A naturalized citizen of the United States, Frank Harris emigrated to America from Ireland, where he was born. Let him tell himself how it happened: "At fourteen I won first prize in a Cambridge

University competition. I was too young to go up, however, so the judges gave the first prize to a boy old enough to enter college and gave me second money, assuring me that I'd win first prize next year. I was so furious, I took the fifty dollars and shipped steerage to America, all on my own." During the voyage his recitations so moved a Boston banker that this good though not dead Bostonian had him transferred to first class and ended by wanting to adopt the boy. "But," says Harris, "since I had just left one father I was not keen about taking another."

Instead he took on a job as sandhog, digging with pick and shovel for the foundations of Brooklyn Bridge. After a year he went to Chicago where he found a job in a hotel. "Before I was seventeen I was practically managing the hotel and making $150 a month and my board. Indeed, I had saved so much money in my first three years in America that two cattle kings invited me to become a partner. And that was how I wandered into the land of dime novels and gunplay in the early seventies."

The present story is the tale of Harris' experiences in this "land of dime novels and gunplay." It is told with the simplicity and directness appropriate to the theme. Whether art assist memory in it or not, it cannot fail to bring home to Americans, with a bright sharpness, how near in the past the wilderness lies. The buffalo who once roamed the plains in their hundred thousands, are now curiosities to be gazed at in a zoo. The Indian, counting his worth by the scalps at his belt, has become a scientific farmer, college-bred. The pioneer of the covered wagon now drives a Packard and enjoys a radio. The life of the cowboy is all peace and his fun only rodeo and bootleg whisky. Yet when his father was a youth, every man's

existence in the wilderness was a "dime novel and gunplay"; the spaces were all "the great open spaces," and willy nilly men had to be men. It is this time that Frank Harris now brings back to us, the time when men lived dangerously and being a hero was an everyday part of everyday's work.

H. M. KALLEN

February, 1930, New York.

MY REMINISCENCES AS A COWBOY

CHAPTER I

HOW I BECAME A COWBOY

Chicago in the early seventies was a city of 350,000 inhabitants. Life there pleased me, but did not impress me greatly. The city was brisk and busy, the houses fine, I thought, and the great lake boundless like the sea; but my reading had taught me to expect all this and more.

Yet my life in Chicago was destined to be the turning point of my existence! I learned to invest the money, most of my salary of $150 a month, knowing I should need it one day, and the day came sooner than I thought.

One day in August, as acting manager of the Fremont Hotel, I received a Spanish family named Vidal. Señor Vidal was like a French Officer of middle height, trim figure; he was very dark with gray mustache waving up at the ends. His wife, motherly but stout, had large dark eyes and small features; a cousin, a man of about thirty, was rather tall with sharp imperious ways. At first I did not notice the girl who was talking to her Indian maid. I understood at once that the Vidals were rich and gave them the best rooms. "All communicating—except

yours," I added, turning to the young man, "it is on the other side of the corridor, but large and quiet." A shrug and a contemptuous nod were all I got for my pains from him.

As I handed the keys to the bell-boy, the girl appeared in a black mantilla. "Any letters for us?" she asked quietly. For a minute I stood dumfounded, enthralled. Then, "I'll see," I replied, and went to the rack, but only to give myself a countenance. I knew there were none.

"None, I'm sorry to say," I half-apologized watching the girl as she moved away.

"What's the matter with me?" I said to myself angrily. "She's nothing wonderful, this Miss Vidal; pretty, yes, and dark with fine dark eyes, but nothing extraordinary." But it would not do; I was shaken in a new way and would not admit it even to myself. In fact the shock was so great that my head took sides against heart and temperament at once, as if alarmed.

Next day I found out that the Vidals were on their way to their hacienda near Chihuahua in Northern Mexico. They meant to rest in Chicago for three or four days because Señora Vidal had heart trouble. I discovered besides that Señor Arriga was either courting his cousin or betrothed to her.

In a thousand little ways I took occasion to commend myself to the Vidals. The beauty of the girl grew on me extraordinarily: yet it was the pride and reserve in her face that fascinated me more even that her great dark eyes or her fine features and splendid coloring.

It is to be presumed that the girl saw how it was with me and was gratified. She betrayed herself in no way, but she was always eager to go downstairs to the lounge

and missed no opportunity of making some inquiry at the desk.

One little talk I got with my goddess: one morning she came to the office to ask about reserving a Pullman drawing-room for El Paso. I undertook at once to see to everything, and when the dainty little lady added in her funny accent: "We have so many baggage, twenty-six bits," I said as earnestly as if my life depended on it:

"Please trust me. I shall see to everything. I only wish," I added, "I could do more for you."

"That's kind," said the coquette, "very kind," looking full at me. Emboldened by despair at her approaching departure I added: "I'm so sorry you're going. I shall never forget you, never."

Taken aback by my directness, the girl laughed saucily: "*Never* means a week, I suppose!"

"You will see," I went on hurriedly as if driven, as indeed I was. "If I thought I should not see you again, and soon, I should not wish to live."

"Hush, hush," she said gravely. "You are too young to take vows and I must not listen." But seeing my sad face, she added: "You have been very kind. I shall remember my stay in Chicago with pleasure." She stretched out her hand. I took it and held it, treasuring every touch.

Her look and the warmth of her fingers I garnered up in my heart as purest treasure.

As soon as she had gone and the radiance with her, I cudgeled my brains to find some pretext for another talk. "She goes to-morrow," hammered in my brain and my heartache choked me, almost preventing my thinking. Suddenly the idea of flowers came to me. I'd buy

a lot. No; every one would notice them and talk. A few would be better. How many? I thought and thought.

When they came into the lounge next day ready to start, I handed her three splendid red rosebuds, prettily tied up with maidenhair fern.

"How kind!" she exclaimed, coloring. "And how pretty," she added, looking at the roses. "Just three?"

"One for your hair," I said with love's cunning, "one for your eyes and one for your heart."

"Will you remember?" I added in a low voice intensely.

She nodded and then looked up sparkling: "As long —as ze flowers last," she laughed, and was back with her mother.

I saw them into the omnibus and got kind words from all the party, even from my rival, Señor Arriga, but cherished most her look and word as she went out of the door.

Holding it open for her, I murmured as she passed, for the others were within hearing: "I shall come soon."

The girl stopped at once, pretending to look at the tag on a trunk the partner was carrying. "El Paso is far away," she sighed, "and the hacienda ten leagues further on. When shall we arrive—when?" she added, glancing up at me.

"When" was the significant word to me for many a month; her eyes had filled it with meaning.

I've told of this meeting with Miss Vidal at length, because it marked an epoch in my life; it was the first time that love had cast her glamour over me making beauty superlative, intoxicating. The passion rendered it easier for me to resist ordinary temptation, for it taught me there was a whole gorgeous world in Love's

kingdom that I had never imagined, much less explored.

At the back of my mind was the fixed resolve to get to Chihuahua somehow or other in the near future and meet my charmer again and that resolve in due course shaped my life anew.

Some time later that year, three strangers came to the hotel, all cattlemen I was told, but of a new sort. Two of them, Reece and Ford, I was to know well.

Harrel Ford, the "Boss" as he was called, was a Westerner from near Leavenworth, Kansas, who owned, it was said, half a dozen ranches and twenty thousand head of cattle; he had just brought four thousand head into the stock yards to be sold. Reece was his partner. Reece, I soon found out, was an Englishman, a lover of books and so became interesting to me at once.

All three, however, were remarkably quiet and discreet and nothing would have been known about them had they not been attended by a Mexican servant whom every one knew as Bob. Bob was at least as taciturn as his masters when sober, but living in the hotel with nothing to do, the other servants got after him and soon discovered that his weak point was a love of strong drink. When he had got outside half a bottle of Bourbon, Bob would brag to beat the band and had stories innumerable at command which gained in the telling from the curious broken jargon he used for American. He was as small as a dime and as cattle-wise as a cow's mother.

Harrel Ford's quiet resolution made an impression on me from the beginning. In appearance he was like any of a dozen tall, thin lantern-jawed Westerners whom I had met; the hawk-like features, sallow skin and careless slangy speech were common, but behind his care-

less manner were hard, keen, grey eyes and a suggestion of immutable decision—a bad antagonist to bargain or fight with.

Reece, whom I was to know best, was a very different kind of man than either Bob or Ford. He was younger, though even quieter than Ford, rather tall, dark and handsome; a little dandyish in dress and talked like the Englishman he was. Though Reece was a partner, Bob, the Mexican, always called Ford "the Boss." I found out the reason later.

Ford never rode in Chicago; indeed, appeared to be more interested in the stock markets than the stock yards, but Reece, in the daytime, was always in cord breeches and high brown boots, and took my fancy by always riding everywhere. Ford seemed to accept my little kindnesses as usual, but Reece was of richer and more generous blood. He asked me one day to come for a ride, adding that Bob, the Mexican servant, would get me a mount; I confessed I had no breeches, but Reece showed me how to put straps on my ordinary trousers. And the same afternoon he took me out for a ride and then together we paid a visit to the stock yards, where to my surprise I found that Ford and Reece had still over two thousand head of cattle and nearly two hundred horses which they had driven up on the long trail from New Mexico to Kansas City and thence by train to Chicago.

I found they were all going down again in the spring and the profits were big. Cows could be bought for a dollar a head, "most everywhere near the Rio Grande," and they fetched from twenty to thirty dollars each

in Chicago. The profits were enormous but the risks were huge.

"I'd like to go down with you," I confessed, but Reece at once warned me about the risks. Indians took nearly one herd out of every two and a good many cowboys lost their lives on the trail. As 5,000 cattle constituted a herd the loss was heavy.

"What do you do if the Indians get your herd?" I asked.

"Go back and get another," replied Reece carelessly, and then added, seeing that I had made up my mind, "but you must see Ford, he's the chief in this business and I shouldn't like to go against him." So he dismissed the matter from his kindly, careless mind.

Fortunately for me, I made up to Bob before I tackled Ford. I had learned a little Spanish grammar in my spare time and knew a few sentences by heart: I shot off a *"buenos dias, Señor,"* one morning at Bob and was answered with a volubility that surprised and overwhelmed me. I had to explain that I was only just learning, a beginner.

"I understan'," replied Bob with grim contempt, "all American man. He asks *'si habla Español'* and den dat's all he know."

But he found that I knew more than that and meant to know much more and soon we were talking half-Spanish, half-English, and Bob taught me a good deal more than the proper pronunciation of the new tongue.

In one of our talks I told him I thought of going with Ford and Reece into the Southwest.

"Reece good man," said Bob, "at once—*Caballero*—

muy bueno; but Ford hard, hard as nail: you talk with me, learn ride . . . then speak with Boss."

So I resolved to bide my time and wait. But one day Ford spoke to me. He began by saying: "You want to go down on the trail, Reece tells me. I'm not going down after this next summer. Why don't you take my place and go in partnership with Reece? It would only cost you six or seven thousand dollars."

"I haven't got so much"—I confessed naïvely—"though I could have by next spring. I have only a couple of thousand dollars saved or at most three thousand."

"Come in for what you have got," said the Boss. "I only took a hand to help Reece. If he's willing to let you in for a quarter for three thousand I'll sell you so much of my mortgage. Then you and I'll have a quarter each against Reece's half and perhaps you will be able to teach him to save and be careful. He's too easy, too generous, too Southern—that's what's the matter with him."

I accepted the offer in principle and when the opportunity offered, talked it over with Reece. Reece, it appeared, had taken a great fancy to me, perhaps because I deferred to him and admired him openly. Without any purpose he had begun teaching me to ride and finding me an apt pupil he took a liking to me as we all do to those we help and can mold.

Half unconsciously, too, I had copied Reece in dress, imitated his seat on horseback, modeled myself outwardly at least on him, and this flattered him and increased his liking for me. It must be remembered that I was only seventeen at that time and he was a man of 35. But the hero-worship had an even deeper effect on me. We all grow by imitating our heroes and even when

we no longer copy them, something of them remains in us.

At length, on one of our afternoon rides together, it was settled by Reece and myself practically as the Boss had proposed.

Then and not till then did I approach the hotel proprietor; I offered to give up my place before the winter began if he would give me a month's salary as bonus. The chief agreed to my proposal on condition that I shouldn't work for any other hotel in Chicago, and we shook hands on the first of September.

A few days later my new friends—the Boss, Reece, Dell and Bob—and I took train for St. Louis, and from St. Louis to Kansas City, at that time a jumping-off place, so to speak. Here we packed our town clothes carefully away in bags for wagon transport, and then, like school boys released, pulled on chaps, flannel shirts and high boots, buckled on cartridge belts and revolvers, slung rifles along our saddles and started off in true cowboy style to ride the two or three hundred miles to Eureka, Kansas, where the partners had a ranch.

The Boss had left a wagon and half a dozen horses in a stable just outside Kansas City in charge of a colored man named Paul. Charlie Bates, a Kansan, had stayed with Paul on what he called "grub wages." By Reece's advice I picked a young mare out of the bunch for my own use and gave the Boss twenty dollars for her. I hadn't had Moll for an hour when I realized that I had made a good bargain.

CHAPTER II

HITTING THE TRAIL

That first ride into the Southwest was of the essence of romance: it was a plunge a thousand miles into the unknown; it was like an old border foray, with enough strangeness to interest and enough danger to warm the blood. One's comrades were all new, too, and had to be learned.

With the intensified resolution given to me by my success in Chicago, I set myself to master riding, the chief art of the cowboy. At once, I realized my life would often depend on it, because being near-sighted, I'd never be a good shot. For the first days I suffered tortures; my hips were all raw, but after washing, or rather frying them well with salt water and whiskey every night, I soon got hard and suffered no further inconvenience. I was more than repaid for all my troubles and pains by Reece's approval. Before the week was over, Reece remarked one evening: "If you persevere you'll ride this summer as well as Bob."

"What can he do that I can't do?" I asked Reece.

"Oh," said Reece, "ask him and you will soon see!"

So the next time we met I asked Bob. He looked at me with a little grin and then said: "Drop something on the ground, a handkerchief or a coin or anything you like." So I dropped a dollar. Immediately Bob shouted, tore away on his horse fifty or sixty yards, swung round and came past me at full gallop.

As he neared the dollar he caught the horse's mane in his left hand, swung down and picked up the dollar and swung back again into place without any apparent exertion. I realized at once that it was an extraordinary feat and set myself forthwith to learn it.

If I say it took me at least a fortnight, working every day for two or three hours, my readers may be surprised. But let them try it and they will find out it takes some doing.

Bob was a little man, five feet four in height, weighing perhaps one hundred and twenty-five pounds; he was weather-beaten and dried up so that he looked like leather; but he was very active and strong in spite of the fact that he must have been fifty years of age. From his appearance it would have been impossible to say what age he was; but he had fought with Santa Anna all through the Mexican War, so he could hardly be less than fifty, though his little brown eyes were just as bright and quick as they had been when he was sixteen, and his seat in the saddle just as firm and his wrist just as supple-strong.

The life was enchanting. Our three wagons, each drawn by a pair of good horses, could make their thirty miles a day. Although one man was always detailed to hunt for the pot, very often he would be accompanied by half a dozen, who would race down buffalo and kill

perhaps three or four cows or calves with revolvers. In the heat of the day the cowboys would play cards for wages to come or shoot one against the other, or simply skylark about. We took seventy to a hundred ponies for the dozen cowboys, and each man broke three or four of these to his own special requirements.

Every now and then one came across a broncho with some particular and peculiar vice. And these were often the most admired and the best cared for of the whole herd for a very simple reason. It was the custom whenever one gang of cowboys met another immediately to trade a broncho and, of course, the most vicious animal was always the one to be swapped. The trading was conducted in the slow Yankee fashion. The spokesman of gang A would try to get the representative of gang B to give some money to boot:

"I guess my hoss is wuth two o' yourn; look at 'im."

"Looks ain't nuthen: I'll bet you five dollars my hoss'll run (gallop) faster'n yourn."

If it was found impossible to get money to boot, half a dozen curious bets would be made, for none of the bets were allowed to suggest the horse's special trick. Finally the bets were agreed to: everything was settled and the two bronchos were solemnly put forward. Then came the heart of the fun.

One of the A gang mounted the horse of the B gang and proceeded to show his paces Commonly he found a practiced and extraordinary buckjumper; but aided by a Mexican saddle it was possible to sit the worst bucker, provided the broncho could not buck himself out of his saddle, which, however, occasionally happened. After this trial one of the B gang would mount

the horse which the A gang had offered. The broncho itself and money, too, changed hands on the result of this contest. Usually the broncho had some impish or devilish trick.

I remember mounting one which seemed to have no fault of any kind. Fortunately for me I was riding on an English saddle, which is like a racing pad in front. The broncho walked, trotted, loped and galloped to perfection. I began to think that the other gang didn't understand the game, and I turned and cantered carelessly back to the crowd. Suddenly, without warning, the beast tucked its forelegs under it and I went rolling over and over like a shot rabbit. I got up half dazed and bleeding from nose and mouth amid yells of laughter from both gangs.

"Quiet to ride, ain't he? Pity he put his foot in that prairie dog's hole,"—and another roar of laughter.

The broncho we usually traded was a very good-looking black mare which had been ruined by rough handling when broken in. She would walk or trot or gallop for two or three minutes and then would stand stock still—a confirmed jibber. Nothing could make her move. And at last the rider had to dismount and pack his own saddle and bridle back to the starting point.

We had another horse which was certain to win the game, or at least to draw it, but she was seldom put forward, for we used her for races on account of her speed and bottom, and a broncho which was swapped was sometimes subjected to a good deal of ill treatment. Blue Dick, as this mare was called, was a fleabitten gray, fifteen and a half hands and pure bred, if it is possible to judge breeding from form and pace and courage.

She had been bought cheap because she had broken up a trap in Kansas City and savaged the groom. After a long time we cured her of every vice save one. When ridden by some one she didn't know she used to stretch her head out again and again till she got the reins a little loose: then she would turn round as quick as a snake, get your toe in her mouth and bite like a fiend. The pain was so horrible—excruciating—I have seen a strong man fall from her back fainting with agony.

It was usually arranged that the crowd which won gained both horses; if the result was a draw, each gang took possession again of its own steed.

I tell these stories just to give an idea of the life. The days spent on the trail were, for the first year, at least, of time-consuming interest. Riding tempered the great heat and made the climate absolutely delightful.

The plains varied from 700 to 1,500 feet above sea level; but that was not sufficient to account for the dry lightness of the amosphere, which exhilarated one like champagne. Shielded on one side by 1,500 miles of plains and on the other by the Rocky Mountains this vast track of country was completely protected from the rain. So dry was the atmosphere that when we killed a buffalo the carcass would dry up to dust without putrefying, and this gave us better jerked meat than was to be found anywhere else in the world, better even than the biltong of South Africa. All you had to do was to take, say, the loin of a buffalo, though the rump was generally used, cut it into strips, sprinkle a little salt on it, and hang it over lines from one wagon to another, or even throw it on the top of the wagon, and leave it there for a day or two, then turn it and leave it another couple of days,

and you had beef which looked like strips of mahogany, yet which ate like the best beef slightly salted; for these hard, wood-like strips got soft in the mouth at once.

Another peculiarity of this dry atmosphere on the great plains was that the short buffalo grass used to dry up and cure itself on the ground, becoming, in fact, hay, without the trouble of cutting and stacking.

It was often said thirty years ago that buffalo meat was praised only by Westerners because they were pretty hungry when they ate it. At the time I thought this a reasonable explanation, but on the trail I found it to be simply silly. Buffalo meat, even when one is not hungry, is the best meat I've ever eaten; as much superior to ordinary beef as grouse is superior to the barn-fed fowl, for not only has it greater tenderness and greater juiciness, but also the game flavor: it was, I decided—the first time I ate it as the hundredth—the best food in the world.

Yet unfortunately the buffalo has been wiped out, and his place given to ordinary domestic cattle. He was indeed an easy prey for several reasons: the bulls were just as savage as the African bull buffalo, but the African bull can retreat into forest, or, worse still, into the heavy thorn bush which he alone can pass through without difficulty; he has therefore an immense advantage over the man hunting him. But a herd of buffalo out on the plains had no protection and could be ridden down and shot, from ten or twelve yards distance, almost as easily as cattle. Moreover, the hunters soon found a peculiarity of the buffalo which placed him at their mercy. Near any salt lick, where the buffaloes were wont to congregate at early morning, it was only necessary to conceal one's self in a neighboring hollow and shoot straight. So

long as the hunter kept out of sight, buffalo after buffalo could be killed. At every shot the uninjured buffaloes would lift their head and look about; but seeing nothing, would again begin to wallow and roll about as if there was no danger to be feared. One morning a hunter killed a herd of thirty-five at such a lick merely for their hides. The hides, untanned, were worth always about five dollars apiece, and each of them weighed some forty pounds. They were too thick and stiff to make good pelts; the hides of the calves and young cows made the best robes.

CHAPTER III

LIFE ON A WESTERN RANCH

Before going down to buy cattle in New Mexico in the Spring, we spent the winter months on Reece's Ranch. I shall never forget the coming to the Ranch. We did not even stop at the little village of Eureka, but left the trail and rode a bee-line across the prairie for home. After nearly ten miles of hard riding we came to a bridge over a little creek that was perhaps fifteen yards wide and three feet deep, and then Ford and Reece began to race up a long slope. I followed hard on their heels, when suddenly on the very ridge of the slope in front I saw the ranch. It was simply a large one-story frame building lifted about three feet from the ground; all the winds of heaven blew underneath it, and the fowls and dogs used this as a shady resting place.

There was a room in which the Boss, Reece and I slept on bunks, and behind a dining room; across the passage from the chief room there was a great room where all the men slept, and behind it the kitchen ruled over by

Peggy, an Indian. He was called Peggy on the theory that cooking was woman's work. There was hardly any furniture in the place; the boys slept on buffalo rugs thrown on bunks round the walls. There was no ornament except pictures from the illustrated papers pasted on the walls. Here and there rifles were hung, and shotguns, revolvers and bowie-knives, a perfect arsenal of modern weapons.

In one corner of the sitting room was a big easy chair, always claimed by any one who was not well, and buffalo rugs were everywhere in heaps.

About three hundred yards from the house was a great stable which Reece had had built of stone. It would hold a hundred horses, had twenty loose boxes for the best horses and immense hay lofts above and enormous corn bins and harness rooms at the side. It was infinitely warmer in winter and cooler in summer and altogether more comfortable than the wooden shanty where the masters lived.

Not a moment of the day on the ranch hung heavy on my hands. The breaking-in of the colts palled a little till an incident took place which taught me that if I had an excellent seat in the saddle I had still a good deal to learn about horses.

An unbroken black mare was brought out one morning, saddled and bridled, and I jumped on her back. Instead of bucking or kicking the animal simply stood stock still as if carved in stone. I played with the bridle and coaxed her; the black took absolutely no notice. One of the men passing by gave her a sharp cut across the hind-quarters with a quirt and an encouraging shout. The mare did not even turn her head or seek to brush

the pain away with a switch of her tail. She seemed hypnotized with fear.

The boys began soon to chaff me; but I had sense enough to take no notice, and the noise brought Reece out to see what was the matter. I felt that in sitting still I had Reece's approval, so I smiled at the boys and paid no attention to Charlie, whose chaff was the loudest. At length Reece said:

"Why don't you get on Charlie and show the tenderfoot how to ride?"

"I'd soon make her go," said Charlie, glad to show off; but after ten minutes of useless efforts he altered his tune.

"No one can make that mare stir except Bob," he said viciously as he dismounted. Without a word Reece went over to the mare, handled her, pulled her ears gently once or twice, then got on her back, and the mare walked away at once.

"How did you do it?" I asked running alongside.

"Search me," answered Reece laughing, "I don't know."

"How did you get such power?" I persisted.

"When I was young," said Reece, "I used to break-in all our colts and a lot of them were thoroughbreds with any amount of spirit—that taught me. Breakin'-in's the best practice in the world."

"Has Bob got your power?" I asked jealously. Reece nodded his handsome head.

"Really?" I exclaimed.

"Bob knows more about cattle," Reece summed up dispassionately, "than any one I ever saw. He's not so good with horses. For instance, his seat now ain't so good as yours; but he knows all animals, I guess, and what

he don't know about steers and bulls ain't worth considering. He's a wonder! You should take Bob as a teacher," he added smiling.

"I was right, wasn't I?" I asked eager for a little praise, "to sit the mare without beating her?"

"Sure, sure!" replied Reece. "She was frightened with all the novel experience. What would you have done if they put a bit in your mouth all of a sudden? To punish her could only make her worse; that's why I came out. These Western men believe too much in brute force—like all young people," he added, as if thinking aloud.

From that moment I resolved to make a friend of Bob and so get the heart of his mystery sooner or later. Meanwhile I went on with my breaking-in persistently morning after morning and soon realized that half the bad temper of horses being pure fear, gentleness and patience were infinitely more effective than whip or spur or rough usage.

One day we were riding in the prairie when we sighted a "coyote" or prairie wolf. It had begun to get warm, and the coyote loped along in front of us apparently unconcerned, as if he knew we had no chance of catching him. A quarter of an hour's riding showed us that we had no chance and just as this impression became dominant, the wolf stopped and turned round to look at his pursuers. A young fellow named Capper, from Wyoming, had got his rifle out at the first halt and now stopped, took a snapshot at the coyote, and as luck would have it, broke his leg, though the coyote must have been six or seven hundred yards away.

"A good shot," cried Reece, pulling his horse to a standstill, "what did you sight for?"

"Seven hundred yards," said the youth casually, "this Winchester is real good," he added modestly. Somehow or other his manner pleased me.

After waiting for the majority of the men who had ridden on eagerly to enjoy the catching of the wounded coyote, we all set off homeward, and a very tired, excited crew sat down to dinner on the ranch that day: Charlie, of course, the loudest of the bunch. He kept on praising Capper's shot till even I saw purpose in it, and at last he came out flat-footed with the conclusion:—

"Joe Capper's the best shot in this camp," but nobody seemed to pay much attention to him till he said: "I'd like to bet a month's pay on Joe against any of us."

Bob took him up.

"I cover your fifty dollars," he squeaked, "Bent's a better shot." Bent, to my astonishment, didn't say a word, in fact, was about the first to leave the table and go about his business. But the money was staked in the Boss' hands and the match fixed for the next Sunday at six in the morning.

The test was a true Western one, and is usually reserved for winter when the snow is on the ground. A turkey was buried, leaving only neck and head above the ground. Perhaps because it was so closely caged, the bird's head was not still for a second. The constantly moving mark, I thought, brought an element of chance into the contest. Capper was there with his Winchester, surrounded by Charlie and others, laughing and joking.

Bent, on the other hand, stood by himself making careful preparation. To my astonishment, he drew the cartridge of his Winchester and refilled it, measuring

the powder most carefully in a little steel measure before pouring it into the shell.

"One would think," I remarked, "that good shooting depended on a single grain of powder."

"That's it," said Bent quietly, "that's the fact." I stared at the man.

The men were to shoot alternatively at three turkeys. The shooting line was drawn at first one hundred yards from the turkey, then two and at last three hundred yards. Capper knelt down, fired quickly and missed. His second shot killed the turkey. Another bird was put into the next hole and again he killed it. Charlie was jubilant.

"Go in and beat that if you can," he cried jeeringly to Bent. Another turkey was in position, and Bent knelt down. He aimed, as it seemed to me, an interminable time and then fired. Before the smoke cleared away showing the turkey was killed, Bent had risen as if in no doubt of the result, opened his rifle and cleaned the barrel out with an oiled rag. By that time another turkey was ready, and he knelt and again killed the bird.

"Good, good," I cried almost beside myself with admiration of the man's uncanny skill. "But why do you take so long to aim?".

"There's a little wind," Bent replied simply; "I wait till it's still."

Again quietly he killed his bird and won a hearty cheer from the boys. Charlie insisted that Capper should have another shot, the first shot should not have counted, and so forth. In silence Capper knelt down. This time I noticed he also took a long time to aim—and killed his bird.

Going back to the ranch I stuck close to Bent. I wanted to know how he had learned his markmanship. Was it merely long practice?

"An' the rifle," Bent corrected, "fine shootin' all in the gun. Capper, I guess, is as good a shot as I am or anybody else, if he'd take care and load properly and use his brains. He missed the first time through not taking thought of the wind."

"Do you mean," I questioned, "that anybody could be a first-rate shot?"

"I reckon so," Bent replied, "anybody with good eyes. Anybody," he went on, "can learn to hold straight." Bent's matter-of-fact simplicity and carefulness made a great impression on me. I felt sorry: I could never become a good shot with my poor eyes.

CHAPTER IV

A GALLOP FOR LIFE

Of course, little by little I got to know every one on the ranch and got to know, too, a good deal of the life that lay before me.

It was in March, I think, the buffalo grass just sprouting, when we resolved to start for the Rio Grande. Reece was to be our boss, Ford not going down, and the men all got $40 a month and a commission on the profits if we succeeded in bringing cattle up to Chicago.

The first days on the trail were not especially exciting. Every one was up about four o'clock, well before daybreak. The first man to awake would throw some buffalo chips (dry dung) on the fire; Peggy, the Indian cook, would soon swing a kettle on it and make the coffee, while some of us went down to the creek and washed our hands and faces, or even had a bath. Then we came fresh and eager to the hot coffee and hot biscuits, with a grill of buffalo steaks and fat bacon.

The air, even in early Spring and before sunrise, was warm, like fresh milk. Suddenly the curtain of the night would be drawn back, opal tints would climb up the

eastern heaven, and these would change to mother-of-pearl, and break into streams of rose and crimson; in a moment the sun would show above the horizon, and at once it was day. After breakfast we would wash up and put things away in one of the wagons; Bent and the negroes would generally climb into a wagon and go to sleep again: the wagons would then be harnessed and commence their journey southward, while the rest of us would mount our bronchos and go on in front, detaching two of our number to drive the rest of the horses. In one respect these bronchos were something like Texan cattle —they all followed a leader and were therefore very easy to drive; bar anything unusual, one had simply to ride behind them, and an occasional flick of the whip or even a shout would keep them moving.

Five or six of us used to be perpetually riding together on young, fresh horses, summer day after summer day. Of course, there was all manner of skylarking and playing about. Some one would have mounted a new horse and want to prove it; immediately a bet would be made, and we would have a race to decide whether the new beast could gallop or not. If he turned out very fast, I would generally be sent off to get Shiloh or Blue Dick out of the herd and see how he would shape beside the fastest we had got. Shiloh was a thoroughbred horse, bought by Reece in Kentucky; as a three-year-old he had done a half-mile in forty-nine seconds, and over a mile was almost as fast as a Derby winner—was certainly as fast as good plating form. He could beat Blue Dick in a sprint or a scurry, but stretch the course from two miles to ten and Blue Dick would beat him a long way. I used to think that if you cantered Blue Dick for half a

mile or so before you made her gallop, you could gallop until you were tired without tiring her.

I remember one occasion when I had to test her: we had camped about sixteen miles from Albuquerque, New Mexico. The men had been skylarking about with a prairie rattlesnake, trying to lift it on little twigs of sage-brush and throw it at each other. The prairie rattlesnake is very small, three feet or so in length, and thin as a whip-lash, whereas the forest rattlesnake is five or six feet long and as thick as a girl's arm; but the prairie rattlesnake, though small, is just as venomous and ten times as quick and bad-tempered as his larger brother. The play ended, therefore, as might have been expected: the rattlesnake stung one of the men, a half-Indian, half-Greaser.

As one of the lightest of the party, I was immediately called and told by Reece, our chief, to round up Blue Dick and ride into Albuquerque and bring out a bottle of whisky, for it appeared that our small barrel had been allowed to get quite empty, and the poisoned man could only have a glass or so. I put a racing pad on Blue Dick's back and started with the boss's last words in my ears, "Don't spare the horse; Indian Pete is in a bad way." Pete was a silent, sulky creature, but the need was imminent, and though I was filled with anxiety about the mare I was to ride, I intended to do my best. I trotted the two hundred or three hundred yards to the creek and took her through the ford quite quietly. On the opposite bank I let her begin to canter, and I cantered for the next mile or so, till she had got quite dry and warm, and then I began to answer her craving for speed and let her go faster into a sort of hand-gallop. I kept at this for about

half an hour, and then loosed her out: in an incredibly short time I found myself on the outskirts of the town. I drew Blue Dick together for the last mile and let her go as hard as she could lay legs to ground. I pulled up at the first saloon in the main street, threw myself from her back, hitched her to the post, rushed in and got a bottle of whisky, stuffed it in my pocket, and buckling my belt round it so as to keep it safe, rushed out, threw myself on Blue Dick's back, and was again racing down the street within two minutes, I should think, from the time I drew rein. Now, I said to myself, I must find out what Blue Dick can do. The heat was tremendous; it must have been quite ninety in the shade, perhaps a hundred and thirty-five in the sun; but the air was light, and though the mare was in a reek of sweat, she was breathing as easily as when she started. Gradually the fear of being late grew upon me, and I let her race as she would: the mare herself seemed to realize that speed was needed, for she settled down to her long stretching gallop, which I always compared to the gallop of a wolf, so tireless it seemed, and long and easy. Mile after mile swept past, and at last I saw the rise in the prairie which was the edge of the creek, and the few, mingy cottonwood trees that showed me I was almost home. Again and again I had strained forward to look at the mare; there seemed no sign of distress in her; and then a sort of exultation in her tireless strength came to me, and wild joy that she was uninjured, and I shook her together with a shout, lifting her in her stride at the same time. At once she got hold of the bit, and before I could do anything had bolted with me at lightning speed. Down to the creek over the steep bank with a plunge into the water;

across, up the opposite bank, and away like a mad thing. I had overshot the wagons by a hundred yards before I could pull her up. There were a dozen hands to take the whisky bottle, which was fortunately whole. I threw myself off the mare and gave her to the care of Mexican Bob, to walk about; but almost at once any anxiety I had about Blue Dick vanished, for she set herself to munch some buffalo grass, and I saw that the long, hard gallop had done her no harm.

Strange to say, the whisky didn't cure the Indian; he could not keep it on his stomach. He didn't even seem to try: from the first he believed that he was done for; he said, "I'm a dead 'un," wrapped himself in his blanket and wanted to be left alone. When I saw him he was in a comatose state, and it was impossible to rouse him. We poured some whisky down his throat, but it was thrown up again immediately: a couple of hours later he was dead.

That same night we buried him under one of the dwarf cottonwood trees near the bank of the creek, and there he probably sleeps quietly enough till this day. Our grief was not deep; none of us knew him well; he was not companionable; he simply disappeared—swept out of sight, like wreckage on a stream.

CHAPTER V

WILD BILL HICKOK

I shall never forget my comrades: especially Wild Bill, Bent and Charlie—all dead already a long time ago, heroes of a tragic Odyssey.

When I went down on the trail the first time, Wild Bill (Hickok was his real surname) attracted my interest immediately. He was very good looking; about 6 feet in height with broad shoulders in spite of his light waist; the features of his face excellent, long straight nose; heavy mustache, dark and long and fine eyes, now gray, now blue—an extremely good-looking man. He had been made City Marshal of one of the new towns springing up, Wichita or Fort Dodge (I forget the precise place). Within a week of his election he had been called to a saloon where there was a row, and had settled it by shooting three of the most quarrelsome. Coming out of the saloon, Bill met a man who made an incautious gesture; quick as a flash he drew and shot—a popular railway boss. Peace—never much esteemed by cowboys and railway hands—seemed dear at the price: a vigilance committee was formed, and next morning two hun-

dred armed men surrounded the Marshal's house to drive him out of the country or kill him. Suddenly the door opened and Bill appeared on the porch, a revolver in each hand.

"What do you 'uns want?"

"Get out! Who killed old Bourbon? Git."

The voices were hardly raised; but there was deadly menace in the quiet tones.

"I want my salary before I go."

"You'll get no salary," said one man in front, meditatively. "I'd go quick if I were you; 'taint healthy for you here."

"That's so; that's so"—a score of voices.

"All right," replied Hickok, quietly, "all right. I s'pose I kin git somethin' to eat first"; and he moved to the door and entered the house.

He had not been fired at partly because it would have been awkward for the first man who raised his hand, and partly because his careless hardihood pleased the crowd. The boys dispersed, but Hickok had to find work some distance away, his methods were too brusque to be popular. And so he took a turn with us on the trail as a cowboy at sixty dollars a month and grub.

It was understood that he would only go with us as far as San Anton, where he was said to have friends. He was not a real cowboy, but a friend of Reece.

Wild Bill was such a peculiar product of the border that he deserves a careful study. He deserves study, too, for the same reason that a mountain tells you more of a country than a piece of plain. He was a freak if you will, but a freak only possible in Western America after the great Civil War. On getting to know him well through

months of intimacy, it became clear to me that he was a product of the war—a characteristic product of a desperate struggle.

With the curiosity of a boy in a strange country, who in spite of himself was impressed by the sort of unwilling respect which every one showed to Bill Hickok, I attached myself to him and plied him with questions. If ever a man was unwilling to talk about himself, incapable of any conscious self-painting, inarticulate in a peculiar degree, it was this man. Shaw's fighters, and Conan Doyle's, and, of course, Shakespeare's have all the glib tongue of trained talkers; but the real fighting men are sometimes wholly inarticulate. Again and again I tried to get out of Hickok how he became so great a revolver shot, the deadest shot in all the Winning of the West. At one time I found out that he always had "a sort of liking for it"; at another, that he practised a great deal as a boy: and again that his father was a "mighty good shot," that "everybody round us thought a lot of it." Mere hints for the picture, but the picture came one day when I chanced to ask him to tell me about his first row, the first time he killed a man. For some reason or other his guard of secretiveness seemed to break down before this direct assault, or perhaps what I took for secretiveness was merely constitutional silence or reticence bred of slow speech. The reader must judge, but in any case, this is what I gathered bit by bit from him.

Bill Hickok had been brought up in Missouri, near Pleasant Hill. Just before the war he was a boy of eighteen or nineteen, his father was a Yankee and Abolitionist, and they lived in the very hottest center of a slave State when feeling ran at its highest. The father

seems to have been a sort of John Brown, with perhaps less piety but more pugnacity, who spoke his mind against slavery in season and out of season, and was willing at any time to put his life on the block. "Why the old man didn't get killed," Wild Bill said, "I don't know: he was always shootin' off his mouth even when he hadn't no need to."

"Didn't he bring you up strictly," I asked, and seeing that he did not understand, I added, "religiously?"

"I should smile," Bill answered. "He was always taking me to the old Methodist Chapel, and he used to pray so loud I was clean ashamed of him. The only thing he ever showed me was how to swing an ax and use a revolver. I could shoot better than the old man from the start," he added.

"But how did you get into your first row?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "it was just before the war and I was kind o' sore. None of the boys about that I used to go to school with would speak to me. They used to shout 'Abolitionist!' after me. So I got mad, and when the girls tossed their heads too and wouldn't look at me, I sort of took it that I *would* be an Abolutionist, though I didn't care nuthin' about the slaves; I always thought niggers should be made to work for white folks anyway. But being forced into defendin' them I did a good job of it and soon the country proved mighty unpleasant for me, so I got out of town. I found work in Pleasant Hill and as I never talked much I got on pretty well. But they were red hot Southerners, all of them, and I was kind o' marked as a black Abolitionist on account of my father. They even tried to tar and feather the old man one night, but some of them got hurt. He got shot twice, but he was

very tough—sort of wiry—and he warn't in bed more'n a week."

Again I came back to the subject. "But how about your first row?" I asked, and after numberless attempts I got him to confess it.

It seems as a sort of outcast, Bill had taken to gambling at Pleasant Hill, and used perpetually to haunt a gambling saloon. He felt he was not wanted and was not liked, but sometimes in the heat of the game the ill-feeling used to be forgotten, just as at other times it became more pronounced.

The spice of danger tempted the reckless spirit of the youth. "Sometimes I was rich and could enjoy myself," he explained, "and that was great as I hadn't had much fun in my life. Sometimes I lost all and it was hell. But even then I was better off than on the farm. I always did like cussin' better than preachin', and a handout at cards seemed to me then better than preachin' any day.

"I had got a gold watch that I froze on to. I had won it fair and square, but one night I had no money and I asked Ned Tomlin, the son of the banker (I knew him at school) to lend me fifty dollars on the watch: I wanted to play. He didn't seem to want to; was mighty cool in fact: told me I didn't ought to play there anyway. I said nuthin', but I laid it up for him, and at last he gave me the money. I soon lost it all; one always does lose borrowed money, and I have noticed one generally loses when one wants most to win—a sort of contrary spirit in the damned pips. About that time there was a great fuss about Abe Lincoln's election, and all slave-owners got spoutin' round and raisin' hell. I got a letter tellin' me I had better get out: Pleasant Hill warn't no place

for Abolitionists. I paid no attention. Then I got a letter from Tomlin tellin' me I had better pay back the fifty dollars and take my watch: he had no use for it. I just paid no attention.

"One night I was up in the gamblin' saloon and they began talkin' about watches, and one of 'em up and said Ned Tomlin was going to carry my watch across the square at Pleasant Hill and auction it off as an Abolitionist's watch who did not pay his debts. I saw it was up to me, so I asked when Tomlin was goin' to do this. It was a Wednesday I remember, and they said, 'Saturday at twelve o'clock, when all the farmers would be in town.' That made me mad, and I just up and said, 'If dead men can carry watches across a public square, Tomlin may carry my watch,' an' I went off to bed.

"On the Saturday morning I got my horse and hitched it up fifty yards down Fremont Street, so as to give me a chance if the crowd did turn on me, as I sort of expected they might. I knew in any case I would have to leave Pleasant Hill: I had felt for sometime it was getting rather warm. On the mornin' I went into the square, and sure enough about twelve o'clock Tomlin left the Planter's House and came down with a hull crowd about him; he had a revolver in his right hand, my watch in his left, and I went out to meet him. I was willin' to give him a chance, so when we got pretty near together I called out pleasant-like:

" 'I guess you have got my watch, Ned, and I want it.' He said: 'I want my fifty dollars. I never did see an Abolitionist that would pay what he owed,' and he kind o' lifted his hand. I drew at once and fired, and as he dropped it came to me that I would have my watch, so I

ran in and grabbed it and crowded it in my pocket and turned to go; but they just leapt me. I must have shot the first one, because he let go, and then I started to run as hard as I could lick for Fremont Street, where my broncho was hitched. As I went, everybody seemed to run and have a shot at me; they must have been excited, for none of 'em hit me till I got to the pony and loosed him and threw myself into the saddle; then I got it in the shoulder—bored me right through. And as I went down the street lickety split I got it again in the left leg —poor shootin' eh?"

"But did Tomlin shoot at you?" I asked.

"I guess so," was the reply.

"Why didn't he hit you?"

"The fellow who gits there fust is generally safe," was the answer.

"And afterwards," I asked, "what did you do?"

"I went off to St. Louis, and from there I wrote to my father, and I got the first letter from the old man I ever read. He told me I had witnessed for the faith, and he was proud of me, and he had put a mortgage on the farm because he saw he would not need it long, and he sent me the five hundred dollars he had raised. I had a good time in St. Louis on it and won nearly five thousand. While I was playin' round, the war broke out, and then I heard my father had been killed—they got him at last. I joined the Northern Army and was made a scout. That is how it began: that's all there's to it. . . ."

Every one spoke of Wild Bill as being a dead shot, but I had no idea how good he was till on the trail.

We had all been skylarking, and some one proposed to shoot for money. A piece of paper was plastered up on

one of the fence posts, perhaps four inches wide by five long. We stood about 40 yards away from the post and paid a dollar for a shot; whoever hit the paper got five dollars; but there were a great many more misses than hits.

Suddenly some one proposed to ride past the paper and see if he could hit it from the galloping horse. We had missed twenty times, every one had missed, when I suddenly saw Wild Bill passing on his horse. I ran over to him and asked him if he would try. None of us had been able to ride past and hit the mark.

"How often do you want hits?" asked Bill.

"Three or four times, if it would be possible," was my answer, "please do it."

He smiled, rode away a few yards and then turned round and came at full speed past the post, perhaps thirty yards away. As he came he whipped out two revolvers and fired right and left, two shots from each and then went on and disappeared. When we got to the paper we found four bullets in it; they could be covered by the palm of one's hand. Such markmanship put an end to the game. We all realized that such skill was beyond our hoping. He was the surest shot, as the kids say, since a horse-pistol was raised from a Colt.

CHAPTER VI

INDIANS PURSUE ME

My most dangerous experience on the trail came about this time, when I was too green to realize the position, and if I found my way out of the trail, it was more by good luck than anything else.

I got up one morning before daybreak, threw some buffalo chips on the fire, swung the coffee-pot across and made myself a steaming hot cup. I was five miles from the trail, experience having taught me that such a course made it easy to find my way back.

This morning I rode for a couple of hours without coming across buffalo "signs"; that is to say, fresh dung. I was hunting for the pot, and the "signs" all seemed weeks old, so I determined to keep straight on again for another hour or two, with the hope of better fortune. The next two hours were barren, so I set my teeth obstinately, and rode on.

At length, I came across a small herd. The prairie here changed its character; it had been almost perfectly flat; it lay now in long rolls, like the waves of the Pacific after a heavy storm. Mounting one ridge I saw a little knot of

buffalo below me in the valley, an old bull and two or three young ones, ten or twelve cows, and two or three calves. Blue Dick knew the game as well as I did, and as soon as I loosed my reins she set off at full gallop; we ran up to the buffalo on the next slope, and I shot one of the young cows. It took me a very short time to cut out the best portions and wrap them up, more or less neatly, in the hide. In half-an-hour I had secured perhaps a hundred pounds on the front of my saddle. I had some dried beef and biscuit with me for dinner, and I decided to give my mare a rest. I was very nearly making up my mind to camp just where I was; but I thought it safer to get on the top of the ridge. It was well for me, as it turned out, that I had sense enough to take this simple precaution. I lay down on the top of the roll, after picketing Blue Dick eight or ten yards away. She went for the grass as if she were hungry, and, lying on my back, I watched the cloud islands stream across the blue till I almost fell asleep.

Suddenly, I noticed that Blue Dick was not grazing; she had her head in the air. At once, I got on my feet and looked, too; but could see nothing. In a moment I had sprung on her back, and, holding on by her mane, stood straight up. I was just in time to see a black spot disappearing over the further ridge. I jumped down again, infinitely excited and a little perplexed. What was it? I wondered. Was it an Indian? Of course, I knew I was on dangerous ground. A moment's reflection taught me, too, that good horse as Blue Dick was, she was not very much superior in speed to Indian ponies when she carried a hundred-weight of buffalo meat as well as her rider, and she had come that morning at least thirty miles from the

camp. In a moment I had got the saddle on her back again, and began making my way along the ridge eastward.

I may have gone for half-an-hour at a slow lope, when two figures showed themselves on the sky line right in front of me, I naturally drew up. They were Indians all right, that I could see. I made up my mind to head northwards and as I loped into the valley I turned at an acute angle to my former course, but as I rose on the next slope there were three figures now in front, and I should have to bend again towards the north if I wished to avoid running right into them. I would not do this. I swung my horse round, and headed as far south as I had previously been traveling north of the direct eastward line; but I had not loped for ten minutes before three or four more shadowy figures appeared on the sky line in front of me. I pulled up to think. My retreat to the trail was cut off. What did it mean? Why didn't they attack? There were at least seven or eight of them. Would it be better to drop the meat and try to race round them, or should I go straight at them? It seemed to me silly to lose the meat before I was compelled. Suddenly it occurred to me that the Indians had tried to head me northward. That was the way, therefore, I had better not go. As they were in front of me, between me and the trail, that was the way to go. Should I go slap-bang at them, or should I try to ride round them? I set myself to weigh the chances.

I was a bad shot. I had already discovered that my eyes were nothing like as good even as the average. Because of that I always had a pair of glasses with me; but the glasses did not help me in shooting, and my shooting at anything above three hundred yards was like

Indian shooting, not very dangerous. That was where the Western American beat the Indian; most Western boys were very good shots indeed at seven or eight hundred, or even a thousand yards, whereas the Indians were no good at all till they got within a hundred and fifty or two hundred yards. Their early practice with the bow-and-arrow still hampered them. It suddenly struck me that if these Indians always showed themselves a thousand or twelve hundred yards away, they kept at that distance probably because they were afraid of my rifle. I grinned to myself. I could barely see them without my glasses, and I stood no chance whatever of hitting them. Still, I thought, the fear may do as well as the reality, and I knew the boys would be wretchedly disappointed and ill-tempered if I came in without meat, so I resolved first to try the bold way, the usual cowboy way, making up my mind that if that did not succeed I would cut the meat loose and gallop for it.

Accordingly I began to lope right towards the Indians; down one slope I went, and they disappeared, and I rose on the opposite slope, my heart in my mouth, expecting to hear their rifles every moment. But I did not even see them till I got right to the top of the slope. There they were, on the next ridge, the seven of them together now, but still half-a-mile in front of me. The distance between us had shrunk. It took a moment's resolution to make up my mind to ride straight again at them. I took out my Winchester, looked to the cartridges, and then went at a lope down the hill into the valley, and at a much slower lope up the opposite hill, keeping my eyes open. But when I got to the top the ruse had been again carried out; the Indians were on the next slope,

but still a little nearer. I clinched my teeth, and went on. When I reached the top of the next ridge there were no Indians to be seen. I at once drew up, and though I knew that using my eye-glasses would betray my weakness, I made up my mind to use them. I must find out what the savages were up to. I put my hand in my pocket for the glasses, when again I began to watch my horse. Blue Dick had cocked her ears, and was facing a little northward. They were surely at some trick; I must see.

I got off the horse, pretended to be busied with the meat, and used my glasses behind the horse's withers. I saw two Indians lying down, and I realized that probably the rest were spread out taking advantage of any inequality of ground, and getting closer to my line of retreat, so that either my horse or myself would probably be hit by one of the last four or five men if I held on my straight eastward course. The plan was quite clear; three would always be riding to intercept me, while four took potshots at me. It was quite clear that I had either to fire and kill the first Indian, or else I had to get rid of some of the meat and gallop round them. I decided upon trying the shot first. I sighted the rifle for a thousand yards, and took another look through my glasses at the nearest Indian. It was as I had guessed. He was lying down behind his pony, watching me, preparing to shoot, indeed. I took careful sight at him, resting my rifle on the horse, and fired. We fired almost together—and I missed! I saw the smoke still in the air above him. He half rose, and then lay down again. I told myself there was no time to be lost. I stuffed the glasses in my pocket, cut loose the parcel of meat, taking about fifteen pounds with me, left the rest on the ground, swept the whole of

the ridges as far as I could see afield and picked out four of the brutes all in a sort of line of dots reaching towards my course.

I got on Blue Dick again, and loped down the hill. As soon as I got into the valley I pulled her to the southward, and rode for all she was worth. By the time I crossed the next ridge four of the Indians in front of me had mounted and were riding to cross me. The rest were out of sight, but were no doubt riding to cut me off later if I succeeded in rounding the first lot. Down into the valley and up on to the ridge again, and the four were nearer. Down into the valley again, urging Blue Dick to her uttermost. As we raced up the slope and over the ridge I saw I could round them. But the others? Two ridges more, or three, I swung to the south; then pulled north-east, calling on Blue Dick to do her best. A couple of miles more in the long, sweeping gallop, and there they were all spread out on my left, the foremost three a thousand yards away; Blue Dick could go nearly two feet to their one, and when I had fairly galloped round them, and got about twelve hundred yards in front of the foremost I suddenly pulled the horse up, jumped off, and had a shot at the nearest rider; it was a mere snap-shot. The rifle was still sighted for a thousand yards. Blue Dick was puffing, and I was a little out of breath and much excited. Yet, as luck would have it, I happened to hold straight, for the foremost Indian pony came down with his rider, heels over head. The rest rode up to him and pulled up, the foremost disentangled himself from his pony, and they stood in a group. As I mounted again they all fired, but when I put up my rifle to fire at them, they scattered like birds. I saw they had a whole-

some respect for my powers of shooting on the one chance shot.

I kept Blue Dick at a steady lope, and two or three hours later I caught sight of the wagons. Blue Dick had had a hard day, and I rubbed her dry and saw her roll before I did anything else. Then after being chaffed for bringing back so little meat, I told the whole story to Charlie and Reece, but it was Bent who found the probable explanation of my escape.

"I ought to have warned you," he said, "but you did just right. It was lucky for you you hit the first time when the Indian was lying down."

"I don't think I did," I said, "I saw the Indian quite plainly afterwards. He was all right."

"Yes," said Bent, "but if you had missed the whole lot he'd have been on top of that pony, coming for you mighty quick. You hit the pony, I reckon, and so the Indian lay tight." (It struck me that I had seen eight Indians at first.) "Still, if you ain't able," continued Bent, "to hit an Indian and his pony at a thousand yards, you surely have no business to go away from the trail by yourself. If they had known you were such a bad shot they'd a' got you sure. But never ride away from them if they show themselves, else they'll put you in a tight place mighty quick."

It gave me a new thrill, for if that Indian had come for me at once I should have had to gallop parallel with the trail for many a mile before I should have been able to swing around clear, if indeed I ever could have done it. I had had a narrower escape than I guessed even then.

Six years later, on almost the same ground, some of the same tribe of Indians, by showing themselves here

and there on the skyline, drove a small surveying party of seven Americans into a sort of canyon, without any outlet, except the way they had entered it. The Indians blocked that, and then sat around the cliffs and picked the Americans off at their leisure. Their bodies were found, all seven of them, horribly mutilated, with hundreds of empty cartridges about them. They had fought for a long while in vain, probably had not killed an Indian, whereas if they had held on their way in the first place, the Indians would have kept at a safe distance.

That one day's experience taught me that safety on the prairie was simply a question of shooting, so I began to practice every morning. At first at four hundred yards (guessing the distance) and then at five hundred, at six, at seven and so on. As the weeks passed my shooting improved. I began to judge distances better. I could use my glasses to pick out objects and then shoot them with considerable accuracy. But since I could never improve my eyes, I could never become a really good shot, and so in time lost interest in the practice.

The careless enjoyment of the hunting had left me. I never went after buffalo again without remembering that my shots might bring Indians upon me; that instead of being the hunter, I might become the hunted. Not only that but I would be at a disadvantage, for bad shots as the Indians were, one chance shot was all that was needed to do the business. If Blue Dick had been touched by a chance bullet that day I should have been killed thirty miles away from the boys or the trail. You don't forget escapes of that sort in a hurry and I resolved never to get caught like that again.

CHAPTER VII

GOOD SPORT AND BAD BLOOD

We had been buying cattle near Taos, and came into the little town frequently on one pretext or another; the real reason being, I imagine, the loneliness of our life on the trail and the fact that in the straggling, sun-baked streets we could occasionally meet women, girls more lovely-innocent than any in Mahomet's paradise. For weeks and weeks of lonely wild life we had not seen a woman: the first good-looking girl seemed to our starved senses a miracle of beauty; when she passed we turned and stared after her, stared till she swung round a corner out of sight and left us still straining to follow and define:

"The subtle torso's hesitating line."

When she disappeared our mouths dried as with fever, and we noticed the refuse on the dusty streets, the empty meat-tins, the prowling mangy curs, the stinking refuse heaps, our soiled and rude garments, and curses of ex-

asperation rose to our lips: "Pretty ruffians we must look," we barked at ourselves; "she didn't even see us."

The little town of Taos was like a Mexican town, or a Spanish town rather, than an American one; the houses were nearly all of one story, square boxes built of adobe, and practically the whole population was Mexican. The best people in the town, those who owned haciendas in the neighborhood, were almost pure Spanish; the lowest class was almost pure Indian; but the great majority of the townsfolk were Mestizos—partly Indian and partly Spanish—ordinary Mexicans, or "Greasers" as we called them, with the full-flavored contempt of complete ignorance. Some of the girls were exactly like Spanish girls: you could see the same face at a bull fight in Seville; but the majority were like Seville gypsies with a darker complexion than the Spaniard, showing plainly the Indian admixture. But in youth these Mexican girls were good looking and had no objection to flirt with us Americanos.

Charlie Bates, of Illinois, was the handsomest fellow in our troop, and Charlie never missed an opportunity of going to Taos. Just as Wild Bill went to the town every evening to gamble, so Charlie rode in dressed in his best, and after the first day or two managed to disappear, none of us could say where. He was chaffed, of course, but he stood it all very well. He was warned, too; chiefly by Bob.

On the trail Bob had always kept to himself and had been very silent; but as soon as he got into New Mexico and heard Spanish talk about him he became a new man. He talked freely in broken English and seemed to understand and know everything. He was invaluable to us in buying cattle; his advice was always to be relied on; and

now in his quaint way he kept warning Charlie: "Mexican bad man; you kiss his girl you get knife—I know!"

Charlie, confident in his great strength (he was just over six feet and weighed 188 pounds) used to laugh at Bob.

"All right," he would say, "I'll look out. I'll keep my eyes open."

"Huh!" Bob would reply, "eyes open no good; dark night, you get no love, but much sick!"

The rest of us were very curious to find out where Charlie went. He had evidently fallen in love, seriously in love, for he would not talk about his conquest, nor even tell us her name. But the passion had no effect upon his spirits; he was never melancholy but laughed and joked as lightheartedly as ever. He was always ready for any game and indeed as soon as Bob told us about the games that were to come off at Taos, Charlie seemed to be bubbling over with excitement and hope.

It appeared that about three times every year, on three great saints' days, they had games at Taos—public games in which any one might join. There were all sorts of riding feats and races, and a fandango to finish up with. We were all curious to know what the games were. Bob tried to describe some of them to us, and we gathered from him that there would be a long horse race and several short ones, and then what he called "play with the cattle," whatever that might mean, and a contest with lariats, which was evidently the performance in which he took the greatest interest. It was from Bob, I think, that I first heard of Charlie's rival; he kept talking about the "Amansador," who was a sort of horse-breaker, or horse-tamer, a fine rider, according to Bob, and one

who knew the cattle, too, a master of the lariat, and preternaturally cunning. While talking to Bob about this man it came to me with a shock of surprise that Bob thought Mexicans much superior to Americans; more intelligent and more chivalrous. "The Amansador: he play with Charlie; Charlie stupid; the Amansador *un caballero gallan!*"

"Great Scott," I thought, "in what corners man's vanity will hide."

"Can he ride better than Charlie?" I asked. "Is he handsomer?" Bob thought he was. About this time in various ways the Amansador took a large place in our thoughts and talk.

Bob evidently regarded him as Charlie's rival, and we all came to think of the meeting of the two as a sort of duel. The Amansador was a Mexican. He had a *hacienda* in the neighborhood, and was evidently fairly well off. Charlie, however, would not admit that there was any rivalry at all. American like, he thought the horse-tamer "a little squirt," and wouldn't even consider him.

Looking back over the years, I see now that it was Bob who at this time directed all our actions. As soon as we camped near Taos he took the Belle and Blue Dick up and fed them on oats; exercised them regularly, too, and got them into condition. He even had them shod with light plates; clearly he meant to win the races if he could. He had got a new lariat, too, made of woven hair, the supplest and strongest I ever saw, and he used to go off by himself and practice with it for hours at a time. Bob was not out for glory or love, but loot, I soon found: *muchas riquezas* to be won in bets. Indeed he was a born gambler, and as he always rode the Belle, a thorough-

bred, in the short races, he was pretty sure to win one or two stakes, for I couldn't believe that any one would beat him in throwing the lasso.

At last the great day dawned. We had all come into Taos the night before and put up in the little inn. At eight in the morning the sports were to begin, and we were all out on the ground before six. The scene was full of life and gayety, though the preparations were of the simplest. A corral had been put up the day before, an ordinary corral for a caballada, with a snubbing post in the middle, and round this the inhabitants grouped themselves, the women, girls and children in the front row. At one part of the corral a canvas roof had been stretched over half a dozen tiers of seats which rose one above the other.

These seats were allotted to the richest inhabitants, chiefly Spaniards of more or less pure blood, and the women and girls here, with flowers in their hair and mantillas, might have come from Malaga or Seville. Some of them were very pretty, and soon I saw Rosariyo —Charlie's *querida*—a very pretty girl, though too dark, I thought, to be of pure blood. She bowed to Charlie with a smile, and was not indifferent to the Amansador either, who rode about the corral like a master ordering and arranging all things. I was surprised to see that the Amansador was decidedly good looking; dark, of course, mahogany color indeed, with a pair of very long thin black mustaches. His eyes were large, bold and his teeth white, and he sat his horse like a centaur. He seemed unarmed, but in the scarlet sash of *faja* round his thin waist there was a long, heavy, sheathed knife, the handle of which was bound with whipcord to give a

grip. The judge of the sports was the *alcalde,* who bore the great Spanish name of Saavedra, the name of Cervantes, and who looked an old gentleman with his pointed white beard and courteous manners.

The sports began by driving a troop of bronchos into the corral. These were galloping round and round. The contestants were grouped at the snubbing post in the middle, and one after the other tried to lasso the horse indicated by the judge. He might call out the alazan, and the lassoer would try as quickly as possible to lasso the alazan or sorrel; then the brown, and then the yegua, and so on. There was a good deal of luck in the matter, but the judging was excellent. Bob and another were declared equal at this game, and as Bob had bet on himself to win outright, he lost heavily, and was not in a good humor, coiling up his new lariat with many strange oaths.

Then came the first race—a sprint of half a mile, ending opposite the judge's seat. What horsemen the Mexicans are! There were at least a hundred entries, and the race had to be run in four heats. Many of the horses entered were good looking; some of them showed blood; but they were all commoners in comparison with the Belle. Bob had done his work excellently, and she came out with her chestnut coat shining like satin. Just sixteen hands and one inch high, she was a model of a race-horse; the long, sloping shoulders, the long neck, the hocks well let down. True, her joints showed wear; true, she was fourteen and not four; but no one who knows what blood means could doubt the result. Still, the betting was very warm. The riders each believed in his own steed, as riders are apt to do, and it was easy

to get ten to one against The Belle. I got the odds to the tune of all I owned in the world. The Belle won her heat by a length, beautifully ridden by Bob, who was determined to win back what he had lost with the lasso. The decisive heat seemed likely to be closer. The Amansador was the starter, and The Belle was showing a good deal of excitement. She was an old hand at the game; but the flaming scarlet sashes and the silver bands to the broad-brimmed hats seemed to excite her. At any rate, she got a very bad start: was left standing, and a bad start in half a mile scurry takes some making up. Our hearts were in our boots: was it possible that The Belle would be beaten? At first, too, she seemed to be moving slower than the rest, but a moment showed us the reason; each stride of hers covered about twice as much ground as any of the others covered. As soon as she got going the race was over; she came like a flash and won as she pleased by ten lengths; it took all Bob's riding to prevent it from being twenty lengths or more. The beauty showed off when it was all over; arching her neck and playing with the bit and sidling about as proud as Punch.

This easy victory caused a good deal of excitement. The frantic cheering which had accompanied each heat was no longer heard: the Mexicans took their beating sulkily; even the women and girls forgot to smile and wave their hands. Every one talked to his neighbor eagerly, and we were left out in the cold. Even Charlie was snubbed; for when he tried to talk to Rosariyo she barely answered him, and gave all her attention to the Amansador. The crowd showed ill-nature: clearly we were not popular winners.

The crowd was against us, that was clear. The ma-

jority of them did not know what fair play was; but the old alcalde seemed scrupulously just, and even polite; he had awarded Bob the race without a question, and Bob was delighted. Bob had got back the money on the scurry which he had lost on the lariat contest, and a bit to boot, and most of the rest of us had done even better. I had turned two hundred and fifty dollars into one thousand five hundred and as the money had been put up with the alcalde, I got it all paid on the nail.

The next sport was one which could only be played in Mexico, and by men who spent their lives with half-wild cattle: it was what Bob called "The game with the cattle," which, in its own way, would be no bad training for a Spanish bull-fighter. This was how the game was played: Some thousand head of cattle were driven "on the run" into the corral, and, as usual, they began to circle round it; they were stopped, however, by men cracking whips in front of the leader, and when the leader turned and the foremost followed him, they were all mixed up in a moment or two in an inextricable knot. The slip-bars were then let down, and the Amansador, on a *yegua parda* (a piebald chestnut pony) galloped in. His task was a difficult one. He had in some way or other to find the leader of that herd of cattle in the inextricable knot, disentangle him from the rest, and head him for the slip-bars. But in the meantime it was very likely, indeed, more than probable, that his horse would be ripped up, and he himself trampled to death, for the half-wild beasts were surging and squirming about in every direction.

While the cattle were being driven in I went over to Bob, who was seated on the corral rails. The corral had

been put up in a hurry so that the posts were joined by boards instead of the usual strips of raw hide, which in time grow hard and tough as bars of steel.

"What do you think of it, Bob?" I asked.

"He good man, the Amansador," said Bob. "He know lot about cattle. Look!"

And, indeed, after riding once around the herd the Amansador had begun to make his way right into the middle of it. He was enormously helped by his horse, who pushed and nosed his way through the frightened cattle as if he had played the game before. But, still, at least once before they were halfway to the center, the horse got badly scored by a horn against his ribs; but the pair went on bravely and carefully, until the Amansador was able to use his whip.

In a moment or two he had got a little clear space in front of one animal, and clearly it was the right one, the leader of the herd, though how he had picked him out I could not imagine, for the next moment the beast began to move forward, and at once all the rest cleared the way for him, and without exception began to follow in his tracks. In two minutes the Amansador and the leader had reached the slip-bars, and the herd was streaming out over the prairie, while the Mexicans cheered and cheered again.

The feat was almost incredible to the Americans; but it had been performed before their eyes, and that it was as dangerous as they thought it, appeared from the long crimson gash on the piebald's ribs. We looked at one another in amazement.

It was evident, too, that the Mexicans believed that no one of our troop could do anything like it, and I ques-

tion if an American cowboy could have been found from Laramie to the Rio Grande who could even have attempted the job. But I stuck close to Bob, and soon found that he was willing to bet all he possessed that he could beat the feat, and what was good enough for Bob seemed good enough for me. At any rate, I thought I might risk five hundred dollars on it, and as I got odds of two to one, I was quite content to deposit my five hundred with the alcalde. Within half an hour the *vaqueros* had driven up a fresh herd and filled the corral with another squirming, writhing set of maddened animals.

When all was ready Bob bowed to the alcalde, and put his hand on his heart to the ladies in a second bow which made us all laugh, and then, on foot, he slipped into the corral and walked straight towards the cattle. Men held their breath: it looked like certain death. I climbed the corral, stood on one of the posts, and watched the feat. Bob walked in, pushed his way in, quietly enough; it really seemed as if the cattle knew him; beast after beast that lowered his head with Bob right on his horns turned his head aside and let him pass. It was astounding. He was caught between two beasts and crushed a bit, more than once; but as soon as he got to their heads they let him pass, for all the world as if they knew him, and in a comparatively short space of time he, too, had put his hand on one beast, and the next moment the knot began to unravel itself, and Bob and the leader were making their way out, while the rest of the herd unraveled themselves and followed behind, like sheep. Naturally, we Americans cheered and cheered again, and to their credit, be it said, there was here and there a lusty cheer from the Mexicans. I think our cheering was as much from a

sense of relief as anything else, for we had all seen the long gash on the piebald's ribs, and we knew that such a touch to Bob would mean death. The Mexican herders themselves were struck dumb with amazement; such a feat on horseback showed an extraordinary knowledge of cattle and extraordinary skill and daring; but on foot it was almost miraculous. However, Bob had done it, and as the herd scattered over the plain he came back to the alcalde for his money, and the alcalde paid him with bows and many admiring compliments, delivered in sonorous Spanish. Even the Amansador came up and complimented his victor and Bob bowed with his hat in his hand, and then bowed again with his hat on his breast to the ladies as if he, too, had been *un caballero gallan.*

Then came the long race. As Blue Dick was mine I was naturally selected to ride her, and as I had done nothing but win money all day long I was very eager to put the coping stone on my good luck by wagering all I possessed on myself, or rather on Blue Dick. I knew that bar accidents she was just as sure to beat any mustang or broncho in Mexico over ten miles as The Belle was sure to beat any of them in a sprint, and the chance of accident was small, for Bob had taken me round the course two days before. It was practically a half circle with a straight cord, about seven miles in all. What made the road run in a half-circle was the fact that it skirted a hill, or rather a promontory, which ran out into the plain. Bob and I had ridden up the foot of this hill to see what it was like, and found it covered with boulders and great shelves of shale, and all overgrown

with cactus and wild vine, a perfectly impassable tangle. The road ran round this hill, which we left on our right; but when we got to the end of the half-circle there was a post round which we had to gallop, and then come straight back along a cattle track about two miles and a half to the corral. Nothing could be fairer than the course, and to all appearances nothing could be fairer than the words of the alcalde, who said, as Bob translated, and as I partially understood, that we were to ride round and, leaving the post on our right hands, come down the straight road, round the corral, and then right round again and down the straight to the judge's stand. But when Bob came up with Blue Dick for me to mount I found him strangely nervous.

"Something wrong," he said. "What it is, don't know. Ride careful! Watch Amansador—he devil man—*demonio!*"

And Reece was no more cheerful, only he talked American, and was perfectly articulate.

"I thought we had taken so much out of these Greasers," he said, "that they would be a little cautious: but they are planking the money down as if they owned the continent. I have put five thousand on you, and it is all winnings, or I wouldn't have risked that. What they are up to, I don't know; but take care."

"I guess that's all right," I replied, light-heartedly, "they haven't seen a horse gallop for fourteen miles yet."

"Well," he said, "they saw how The Belle could move; that ought to have taught 'em. But the money talks, my boy; and when men are willing to give odds against you after losing three or four times running, it ain't healthy. I don't like to be against the big money. You take care!"

I had already guessed that the Amansador was to be my opponent; but he came out now with a mare I could not help admiring. She was dark brown and bigger than most mustangs, perhaps fifteen hands and an inch in height, and perfect in shape, perhaps too perfect for great speed or astonishing endurance. I mean by that her hips were a little too round, she carried herself a little too jauntily; but she was certainly a picture, and in the pink of condition. She must have had some racing blood in her, for the Spanish eye was caught by her looks, and the crowd cheered as the Amansador rode up on her, and indeed she looked like a high-born lady beside a commoner in comparison with Blue Dick.

Blue Dick was an inch or two taller, but scrawny and lean, and she carried her big heavy head almost on a level with her withers—a gray punctured all over with dark spots. She was not a beauty, except to the horseman; but when you came to look at her you saw how well she was let down behind, you noticed, too, the long sloping shoulders, the long neck; she was coupled closely up, too, and very deep in the chest, yet light in the body, with great legs and good big feet. The more you looked at her the more she grew on you as a horse for a long and hard ride; if her heart were only as good as her legs, you thought, she might gallop forever.

As soon as Blue Dick (also a mare) moved she held herself better, and the Mexicans must have noticed her long raking stride, for their cheering died away. I could have kissed her. Bob had put a racing pad on her, and in a moment I had mounted and cantered to the judge's stand.

We started quite fairly to the "One, two, three!" of

the judge, and at first the Amansador seemed as if he were willing to make a race of it. He went off at three-quarter speed, and I soon had all my work to keep Blue Dick from really traveling. For perhaps a quarter of an hour we galloped side by side, and more than once I caught the Amansador grinning at me. He was confident enough of the result, I thought, and yet he must know, he must see and feel that I could leave him at any moment. I resolved to make it plain to him, so loosed my hands for a moment, and Blue Dick was at once a length ahead and had to be pulled up again to allow the brown to keep side by side. Still the Amansador was smiling, and that strengthened the warnings of Reece and Bob, and I began to ride cautiously, which as it turned out, was the very worst thing I could have done.

I had made up my mind at the beginning to ride Blue Dick out in the fourteen miles, to try to do them as fast as I could without hurting the horse; but now I changed my tactics and went on riding side by side with the Amansador. He went round the half-circle, and both passed round the post together, or almost together, and then perhaps boyish vanity, or perhaps the fact that Blue Dick was pulling me almost out of the saddle, induced me to let her have her way a little, and coming down the straight I left the Amansador by about a hundred or a hundred and fifty yards. As I passed round the corral and the judge's box I could see the Amansador coming up to it, and the Mexicans were all cheering him; that again gave me reason for thought; but I could make nothing of it. Blue Dick was going as well as ever, and once again I was on the broad prairie road swinging round the promontory.

The cheering and the warnings did their work, and every now and then I turned in the sadde to see where my opponent was. It was lucky for me that I did. As I came towards the center of the circular arc I looked round again; but my rival had disappeared! Involuntarily I half pulled Blue Dick up and looked again. Then I saw that the Amansador was making his way across the hill, which Bob and I had thought could not be crossed, and the whole trick was clear to me. No wonder the Mexicans were willing to back the Amansador. He had let me get ahead, because if we had been together I might have followed him on the short cut; now I had no hope of going back to try to find his track: my only chance was to sit tight and ride for all I was worth.

How much had he gained by the trick? Probably half a mile or more: still we had five miles to go. I took Blue Dick by the head and let her go: all I could do now was to sit forward on her as far as I could and ride her out; the mare answered like a lion, as she always did. When I got round the circle I saw the post in front of me, half a mile away, I caught sight, too, of the Amansador, loping slowly down to the prairie track. As he came round the post my heart fell; he was fully five hundred yards ahead of me: there was nothing left for it but to round the post too, and follow him. He waved his hand to me in derision as he turned the post. Clearly he thought the race was over; but I didn't: for Blue Dick was going as strong as ever. In a few desperate long seconds I was round the post, too, chasing the brown down the straight; I was gaining at every stride; my heart sank to my boots, for I saw the goal at the same moment, and it didn't seem

possible to make up the long start, and it hurt me to have to ride Blue Dick half to death to win. It was all my fault I kept saying to myself, and the fault of their damned cautious advice: if they had left me alone I would have ridden the horse the first round and been more than half a mile ahead. However, there was nothing to be done but ride on, and I realized how long and bitter is a stern chase.

But at the lowest ebb of hope help came to me. Suddenly there was another horse beside me on the track; it was The Belle, ridden by Bob, and at once I knew that Bob had brought me the best aid in the world, for these two, Blue Dick and The Belle, had always been ridden together, one against the other in races, and while The Belle was a little faster in sprint, Blue Dick was always able to ride her down in anything over a mile and a half, and as Bob kept ahead of me now Blue Dick would kill herself to catch The Belle.

About two hundred yards from the judge's stand we caught the brown mare, and in spite of every effort of the Amansador, who sat down and rode like a demon when he was challenged, we forged ahead. As we swept past the stand The Belle was a length ahead of Blue Dick, and Blue Dick was just about a length ahead of the brown.

As I pulled up I saw that there would be trouble. There was a crowd of men about the seats where the alcalde and his friends were sitting, and they were shouting and gesticulating like mad people. I gave Bob the horse and as I did so he said:

"Better give Bob your money."

"Why?"

"Those men try to get their money back, try hard," Bob answered. "You better come 'long, no go back."

"Oh," said I, "I am going back after the stakes"; but on second thought I handed Bob the roll of bills which I had already won and then set off for the alcalde.

I need not have hurried so. Our just and upright judge had had a moment's almost pardonable weakness. He had not given his verdict at once, and time didn't make the decision simpler, for now he was exposed to a mob of Mexicans, who wanted a verdict in favor of the Amansador. They all declared that Bob alone had enabled me to win the race, which was quite true; the Americans, of course, retorted that the Amansador had cheated by taking the short cut. At last the alcalde declared that the race was not properly ridden, and that all bets were off. This naturally aroused the anger of both parties, and particularly the Americans, of whom Charlie was perhaps the most outspoken.

"What," he cried, "we've beaten you in spite of your tricks, and yet you ain't satisfied."

The Amansador answered him hotly, and I came up in time to see Charlie hit the Amansador clean off his feet. In a moment the Amansador had drawn his knife and rushed at him; but Charlie's revolver was drawn, and he carelessly invited the Amansador to come and take his soup.

Thanks to our Boss, who alone kept his head while the two sets of combatants were at weapons drawn, the quarrel seemed to calm down; the Boss declared to our astonishment that the decision was a good one; both sides, he said, had played tricks; he wanted his stake

money back and that was all, and with that the rest of us were fain to be content, and so at length we drew off in good order; but blood had been shed, blows given, and when we reached the hotel both Bob and the Boss agreed that we had better saddle up and get out to camp.

"We haven't done so badly on the day, after all. It has been worth fifteen thousand dollars to us," said the Boss, "and for that we must expect a lot of ill-humor. I'd stand quite a considerable amount of bad temper on the part of a Greaser for the five thousand dollars I've won, and if we didn't double our stakes at the end: well, I notice you never do double your stakes in this world just when you want to."

But Charlie was not to be argued into going.

"I mean staying in Taos," he said; "perhaps I shall see our friend the Amansador again and try pistols against knife."

His careless speech was truer than he fancied.

Boy-like, I was very much impressed by Charlie's thoughtless courage, and went with him when he strolled to the inn, which was also a gambling-house. On the ground floor, which was devoted to eating and drinking, we met the rest of the boys. After a hasty meal, Charlie went up to the faro-room. About the same time, a little after sundown, Reece rose, saying he was going out to the camp, and I'd better come along; but I refused.

"I guess I'll stay with Charlie," I said, obstinately. Reece put his hand on my arm in a good-natured way: "We ought to hold together, don't you think? It's better for all of us to be in camp to-night?" he added, turning to Bent.

"Sure," said Bent, "whoever looks for trouble in this

world is making a mistake; and when 'tain't his own trouble he's half a dozen sorts of a damned fool. Sonny," he turned to me, "you're goin' to get more kicks 'n you want; you come right along, and wait a year or two."

Reece's kindness had brought me to hesitation, but the patronizing air of Bent, or the word "Sonny," or both, decided me; I hunted about in my mind for a retort.

"Advice is cheap," was all I could find; "I guess I'll stay and play faro."

Bent turned carelessly on his heel and walked out into the night; but Reece was full of kindness.

"Let some one take care of your money," he said, "if you're determined to stay."

I told him I had already given it all to Bob, except a hundred dollars. "I'm not quite a fool, you see," I added conceitedly; "but I'd rather you had it than Bob, if you'd get it from him." He smiled at me, but lingered.

"Bob's all right! I guess. . . . Well, a willful man must have his way; only, if you are in doubt at all, get on Blue Dick, and come out to camp; it's safer."

I nodded farewell to my best friend, and went up the stairs to the faro room. Charlie was playing, and so was Bent, I was glad to see; and so, by rare good fortune, was Wild Bill—at the bottom of the table. When I came in Bent said:

"I thought you'd gone."

"Oh, no," said Charlie, "I knew he meant staying; he's a sticker!"

The off-hand praise flushed my cheeks with pleasure. Wild Bill Hickok looked at me without speaking; I went and sat beside him, and followed his game for an hour. I never saw any one play with steadier bad luck;

he lost three throws out of five, till he had no money left.

"Can't you stake me?" he asked, roughly.

"So far as fifty dollars 'll go," I said, a little proud of being asked. "You know there's going to be a row here?"

"I guess it's in the air," he replied.

"Well," I said, "I'm right glad you're here to lend Charlie a hand."

"Why should I chip in?" he asked. " 'Tain't my circus. Charlie's running after that girl Rosariyo, and she's pretty enough for anything; but she's engaged to the Amansador."

"What does that matter?" I retorted, hotly; "if she prefers Charlie, we ought to stick up for him."

"The girl," said Bill, "is the Amansador's niece; so if Charlie kills the Amansador, he ain't further for'ard. He has got himself in a tight place, and he ain't the man to win out."

"But you'll stand by him to-night?" I asked.

"Not me," said Wild Bill, shaking his head.

"It'd be downright mean," I said, hotly, "to go off and leave him to fight the whole town."

"That's what I am going to do," said Wild Bill, coolly. "Why should I fight to get Charlie a girl? I ain't Charlie's father, and if I were his father, I'd tell him to slide out of this noose. Don't be a fool, boy. Charlie's asking for the knife, and he'll get it in spite of you and me and the hull caboose."

Wild Bill depressed me; he was so clearly right and yet so selfish-hard. Were all these men selfish? I asked myself, so as soon as Bent, who had won about a hundred dollars, got up, I went over to him, and said I hoped he'd see Charlie through.

"I'm going down right now to saddle up," he said, "and ride to camp; I don't take no stock in Charlie," he spoke contemptuously.

"Well," I said, "I'm going to stay."

"So long," said Bent, turning on his heel, and walking to the door. Just as he reached the door the Amansador, accompanied by a crowd of young Taos bloods, came into the room. Bent looked at them in a detached sort of way, and then called out to me:

"Air ye comin?"

It was well meant but I shook my head, and from my place behind Charlie, touched him with my knee. He looked up and saw the crowd; but made no sign. The next moment Bent had disappeared down the stairs. The Mexicans flooded round the table: as soon as they came close to Charlie he got up, as if he had played enough, and moved back from the table. Wild Bill, I noticed, went on playing as if nothing unusual was happening. As soon as Charlie stood up, evidently on his guard, the Mexicans paused, and in this pause the Amansador came forward and spoke.

"I want to talk to you," he said to Charlie in his broken English. "You have struck me: I want a duel to-morrow morning."

"Why not now?" replied Charlie, smiling at him.

"It is not possible to fight a duel here," said the Mexican scornfully. "As you struck me, I can certainly challenge you to fight where I like."

"Sure," said Charlie, contemptuously, "if it's the ground you've a fancy for, pick your own square acre: I'll be there."

"Six o'clock to-morrow morning," replied the Aman-

sador, gravely, "by the judge's stand, where you struck me."

"That holds," said Charlie, still smiling. "I'll be on hand at six."

"One revolver each, on horseback," added the Amansador.

"It's a go," replied Charlie carelessly.

The Amansador bowed profoundly to him, and Charlie smiled in his own good-humored way. I could not help feeling a certain sympathy for the Amansador. He had a pair of very bad black eyes, and a nasty cut on the forehead, and yet there was in him cool courage and determination. He might, I thought, too, have asked for the choice of weapons, and chosen knives: instead of that, he selected the revolver, a sign of astonishing courage, it seemed to me, or more than courage. But natural loyalty pushed the unwilling admiration into the background: "If he's willing to take on Charlie with revolvers," I thought, "why, he'll find out that Charlie can shoot." At the same time, the blood went racing through my veins, and I kept thinking eagerly of the next morning.

As soon as the Amansador left, Charlie sat down and began to play again, in spite of my prayers that he would come away, for I felt vaguely that the crowd was extremely hostile: no one looked at him, no one spoke; but there was enmity in the air. The Taos *caballeros* talked to each other in Spanish, and tried to get rid of their anger by showing contempt for the two or three Americans, who, however, paid no attention to their scowls and sneers. I was about to ask Charlie again to come away with me, when Wild Bill stood up.

"Say," he said coming to me, "I have won your money back; here it is," and he gave me back my fifty dollars.

I looked at him appealingly—I wanted him to stay: I knew what an army he would be in himself; but he paid no attention to my looks.

"So long," he said at length, and moved towards the door. As he went I distinctly noticed signs of satisfaction exchanged between some of the Mexicans; those in the way moved out of it, to let him pass; evidently they were glad he was going. They knew he was a dead-shot like none on earth. I hurried after him, and tried one more appeal.

"Stay five minutes, Bill," I pleaded, "and I'll get Charlie out."

"Not two," he replied. "You come along."

"No," I shook my head and went back into the room.

For the next hour I stood behind Charlie's chair, and strange to say, he won steadily, won heavily. His few hundred dollars were multiplied tenfold, he had a fiendish luck all through the hour; the exclamations at his luck grew louder, dislike of him was shown more and more clearly by the Mexicans. At last Charlie got up, and took in the whole crowd with one comprehensive glance.

"I guess we'll go," he said to me. He made a wad of his money, and thrust it down into his pocket. While he was doing this I noticed that eight or ten of the Mexicans had quietly left the place, but at the moment I paid little attention to this, for I was only thinking how Charlie would get out of the room. It seemed to me certain, from the manners of the Mexicans, that he would be attacked; but his cool indifference and evident

strength carried him through. I was so wrought up that I was disappointed when I found myself behind him on the stairs. Nobody had made an effort to stop him, though there were half-a-dozen exclamations as he passed, which were certainly offensive. We got through the room downstairs, too, and out into the night without being molested or attacked.

It was a perfect southern night; the broad street, with its dwarfed adobe houses stretched before us, every house clear cut and shining as if it were hewn of marble; the light of a nearly full moon divided the streets into blackest shadow and a lane of ivory light.

"Where are you stayin'?" asked Charlie.

"I suppose I'll go back to the hotel, to my room there."

"You'll be on hand in the morning?" Charlie went on.

"You bet," I replied, and we walked down the street together.

"Curious," said Charlie, "how I met my girl. She's the Amansador's niece, they say. I didn't know that. I didn't know that uncles and nieces could marry here, till the other day; but she's livin' in the house where I took rooms. I took the rooms there because I saw her go in one day. She's a peach."

"But if she's a niece of the Amansador," I said, "you won't get much advantage from quarreling with him."

"Oh, get out!" he laughed, in his light-hearted way. "I guess the girl likes me best, and I ain't goin' to stop for any Greaser. I didn't like the look of them fellers in the house to-night. I guess they're all curs; I calculated we'd have to fight to get out."

It suddenly occurred to me to tell him what I had seen.

"Eight or ten of them, you know, left the room the moment you got up."

"So?" Charlie exclaimed. "Sure?"

"Dead sure."

"Well," said Charlie, "I guess I'll walk in the middle of the road from here home," and at the same moment I noticed he pulled the butt of his revolver ready to his hand.

"I'll go with you," I said, for we had stopped already at a corner.

"I guess it's all right. I have only got one more block and a few yards down a side street, and I'm to home."

"I'll come along," I said, and we walked the next block. At the end of this block the houses happened to be taller, and we found ourselves in profound shadow, the white light having climbed half-way up the opposite wall. I could not see at first; the change of light was so great, and this accounts for the fact that I can hardly tell how the attack came, save that it was very sudden-swift, and was countered by pure good luck.

I had just stepped into the deepest shadow, when the first man sprang across me at Charlie; he came quite close past my face, and intuitively I shot out my hand, not even closed, against his shoulder. I must have struck him just as his foot left the ground for he went down rolling like a ninepin. I drew back astonished, scarcely realizing yet what was happening. Charlie rushed forward the half dozen steps that took him into the full glare of the moonlight at the corner. One man rushed at him from the shadow, and Charlie fired twice or three times as he came. The man fell and squirmed about. Another sprang out, and again Charlie fired a couple of

times, and then I, too, drew my pistol and rushed to stand by Charlie; but I was too late. Three little shadow-figures sprang from the dark together, and the next moment Charlie was down, just as I reached him. I fired at the two who ran away, and there were two Mexicans at my feet, beside my friend. I lifted Charlie up, and saw that his face was ghastly in the moonlight.

"Got it in my arm," he gasped, "through the shoulder, and in the leg bad!"

He was right; the worst wound was in the thigh, but a moment's thought told me I could stop the blood with the handle of the Mexican knives that were lying by me and a handkerchief. The gushing blood scared me, so I made a tourniquet at once and stopped the thigh wound. Then I began to look for the shoulder injury, but again I had to take the arm first, as it seemed to be bleeding badly.

I was afraid from the quiet way Charlie was lying that he was injured internally, that the knife had gone through his shoulder and through the lung. The knife was still in the wound; it looked ghastly, and made me feel even worse when I drew it out. The blood followed in a gushing stream, and all I could do was to hold the lips of the wound together as tightly as possible and cudgel my brains as to how I could get help. Charlie seemed to have divined my difficulty, for he said immediately I had staunched the blood:

"Three doors down on the left, lean me back on the shoulder." I put a pad of a handkerchief behind his shoulder, and hauled one of the Mexicans over to him, and laid Charlie on him, and ran to the house. The door

opened as I knocked the first time, and in my haste I said in English:

"Are you Rosariyo? Charlie's wounded. Give me a towel or two and come."

The girl slipped into the house again, and reappeared with some towels in a moment, and we ran to the corner. She helped me to lift Charlie up, and I was strong enough to take him in my arms and carry him the fifteen or twenty yards to the house, where I laid him on a sofa in the front room.

The doctor, Rosariyo told me, was on the next corner, and in five minutes I had knocked him up and brought him to Charlie, but I noticed as I passed that neither of the Mexicans whom I had taken for dead was now in the street; the place was empty, save for a map of blood. They must have been carried away by their friends, for the one I rested Charlie on I was pretty sure was not able to get away on his own accord, or else he was able to sham death marvelously.

The doctor asked me to help him, and I soon found he knew what a knife wound was. He pointed to the Mexican knife, which I had used as a tourniquet for the thigh wound, and said comically:

"Poison and antidote."

I could not help grinning at his peculiar pronunciation. He first unbound the arm, and very skillfully took up the arteries, put in a couple of stitches, brought the lips of the cut together with sticking plaster, and made it look decent. Then he examined the shoulder wound, and pursed his lips gravely.

"Your friend's in luck," he said at length. "The knife struck the shoulder-blade, and went up instead of down.

I do not think the lung's touched; it may be healed in a week."

The next moment he busied himself with the thigh wound and began to cut away the breeches, all soaked with blood.

"This is the danger," he said gravely. "Much blood lost, much."

He undid the tourniquet, deftly and I was shocked at the rush of blood. Work as quickly as we might it took four or five minutes before the arteries were all tied up and the flood stemmed. By that time Charlie had fainted. The doctor again put in stitches, and again put on the plaster, and then felt Charlie's pulse. He shook his head at first.

"Perfect rest," he said; "not to be moved for a fortnight. He's young and strong, and the *señorita* will feed him up. He'll recover, but if that knife in the shoulder had gone a quarter of an inch lower he would have been carried out feet foremost."

It was not till the doctor asked for a basin that I noticed my hands, too, were covered with blood, and my arms, and my breeches. I grew furious with rage at the cowards who would attack a man in the dark, six or eight to one! We washed our hands in almost silence, and then for the first time I studied Rosariyo—the cause of the struggle. She seemed to me an ordinary, nice-looking Mexican girl, certainly not worth wasting a life over; but her cheeks were very pale, and she had been crying, which may have detracted from her good looks. I had to acknowledge that her eyes were fine and her teeth white, but there was little more beauty in her, in my

opinion, than the beauty of youth. She was voluble, however, in protestations of what she would do for Charlie, and so I bowed to her and left him in her care. He just came to before I left the house and thanked us.

"Guess I'll be all right, now," he said.

At the corner I wanted to get away by myself, but the doctor came to the hotel with me, and did not leave me until we were in the hall.

"You seem to take it as a matter of course," I said to him at parting.

"Oh," he said, "every race meeting has always half-a-dozen wounds. I must get back now to attend to some of those your friend has made. But revolver wounds are seldom as dangerous as knife wounds. Seldom."

"Really?" I said. "That astonishes me."

"It is the knife that's deadly," said the little brown-eyed doctor. "*El cuchillo* is the Angel of Death."

I had enough to do in the next few days. For forty-eight hours or so Charlie frightened me; he had lost so much blood that he lay more like a waxen image than a man. Even his lips were white, and he turned from all food, so that Rosariyo had a job even to get him to drink the beef-tea and milk with which she plied him alternatively. When he began to get better he became astonishingly irritable, wanting to know what was going on outside, what had I arranged with the Amansador? What did the Boss say? Had he killed both the men he shot down? Question on question, and then tossings and cursings, which only retarded his recovery. But as soon as he began to get more blood in his veins he recovered rapidly; almost every hour one could see the face alter, the outlines of it grew rounder, the red came back to his

lips in a day and the light to his eyes. After the first forty-eight hours, we had little or no anxiety on his behalf.

I had communicated with the Amansador through the doctor, and had received from him a courteous message, that as soon as the *Señor* was well, any appointment I might make the Amansador would keep. I hesitated to give this message to Charlie, and took counsel with the doctor, who told me it was as well to let Charlie get strong and well first.

"You know," he added dryly, "I only attended to one man wounded with a revolver that night, though you said two had been shot down."

"Was the other man killed?" I asked.

The doctor looked at me:

"I don't think your friend Charlie is very safe here; as soon as he can he had better get to horse."

Of course I wanted to know about the man Charlie had wounded, but the doctor was curiously reticent; he waved his hands at me and shrugged his shoulders, and told me that unless revolver shots went into fatal parts, they did not do much damage.

At the end of the week I gathered that the wounded man was out of danger.

After three or four days in the town, spent mostly at Charlie's bedside, I was called out to camp, for a thousand head of cattle had been bought at a ranch some fifty miles away, and I had to help to bring them in and get the five or six small herds to move together as one, and under one leader—a task which always took a little time. I was back again at the end of three days and found Charlie determined to get up, and a strange

sight he looked when he did get up for the first time. He took about two hours to get half dressed, and I found him panting in an armchair, looking like a skeleton; his clothes hung about him in the funniest way. In half-an-hour, too, he was glad to get back to bed again and lie still; he was astonishingly weak. The doctor came in shortly afterwards, and told him that it would take him at least a week to be up and about.

"And you will not be strong," he added, "for a month or so."

The doctor assured me that if he had not injected salt-water the first night Charlie would have died from sheer loss of blood. "The heart," he said, "is a mechanism—and something more," he added dryly.

Having watched Charlie with Rosariyo for two or three days, it was pretty clear to me that the girl liked him; but I was uncertain whether she loved him or not. I think it was this same uncertainty which made him so eager to have the duel with the Amansador. One afternoon I seized the opportunity of asking Rosariyo what she wanted. I had been trying to speak Mexican to Bob, and had learned a good many words and phrases, so I managed to get from Rosariyo that the Amansador was very kind to her, and that it was a great pity that he and Charlie should fight, for Charlie was a heretic, and had better go away, though he was very nice. The girl showed plainly that her estimate of him as a heretic put him out of her head as a possible husband; she spoke in so convinced a manner about it that I made up my mind to get Charlie away as soon as possible, without any fight with the Amansador.

I took the first opportunity of talking to Charlie about

it, but found his mind made up; he was going to give the Amansador a "show-down" before he left Taos. It was with difficulty that I could disentangle his motives; partly he had convinced himself that it was fair to the Amansador, who had challenged him; partly he felt that if the Amansador were out of the way he would be nearer to Rosariyo, but I think the determining motive was mere vanity and absolute confidence in his skill with his weapon. Superior strength or skill makes bullies of all but the best man. There was a rooted belief in Charlie that no other race except the American could use a revolver.

"A gun don't come natural to Greasers," he said one afternoon; "they want to aim and figger about, and can't get within six inches of where they want to hit."

Desirous at all costs of getting away without fighting, I rode out to camp the same evening, and laid the whole affair before Bent and Reece. They both agreed with me that fighting was folly, and as Reece had made up his mind to go for a short expedition down towards the Rio Grande, where Bob said cattle were cheaper, it was decided that he should come in the next afternoon and tell Charlie that he must start the following morning, or else lose his job. Reece came in as arranged, and for a few hours it looked as if his remonstrances had been effective.

We parted with Charlie in a friendly way, and I went to supper with Reece at the hotel. There, about nine o'clock we were joined by the doctor, who told me he thought we had decided there was to be no fight.

"Yes," I said, "we are leaving in the morning."

"The Amansador has been told," he replied, "that

Charlie will be at the judge's stand to-morrow morning at daybreak to meet him."

"You don't mean it?" I cried. "How did Charlie get the message taken?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"He will scarcely get out of the town alive if he shoots the Amansador."

The doctor seemed very much annoyed; but he was not more vexed than I was. We decided it was no good talking to Charlie again on the matter. Reece wanted us to come out to the camp and leave the hothead to his fate, but I could not follow his advice in this, and I could not get him to promise to see Charlie through in the morning; he would have "nothing to do with the nonsensical business," and begged me to come away, too; but I could not go.

Next morning about half-past four o'clock, as I was girthing up Blue Dick, I found Charlie standing beside me. He had come round for his horse, he said. He looked more like a ghost than a man; it had taken him half an hour to walk the three hundred yards, and I do not think he could have saddled his horse if I had not helped him; but once in the saddle he swore he was all right, and indeed he looked better; we loped out to the meeting together.

The Amansador was already on the spot, accompanied by half a dozen young Mexicans, some of whom, it seemed to me, I had seen before. I took it on myself to ask Charlie to pull up, and as he did so involuntarily, I rode on to the group and said at once to the Amansador that I hoped the matter could be settled, that Charlie was not fit to fight, that he was scarcely able to sit his

horse, that a fair fight under the circumstances was impossible.

The Amansador bowed, and said that if Charlie apologized for the blow he would be satisfied; he did not want to fight a wounded man; in fact, he was sorry, he said, to see that my friend was not strong. Nothing could have been in better taste, so I rode back to Charlie and told him all he had to do was simply to say that he was sorry, and the matter would be settled.

"Sorry be damned," cried Charlie, in a rage. "I won't apologize to any Greaser that ever walked. Get aside!"

With that he drew his revolver, and loped to within fifty yards of the Amansador.

"Here I am," he said, "and willin' to oblige."

The Mexicans immediately scattered like frightened birds. The Amansador, after lifting his hat, drew his revolver, too. Charlie's horse walked directly towards him. When about thirty yards separated them, Charlie threw up his revolver; at the same moment the Amansador disappeared on the other side of his horse, and it started into a canter. Charlie had fired an instant, I thought, too late; but almost immediately he realized that he would be shot at from under the neck of the Amansador's horse, so quicker than one can tell it, he fired again and again; the first time at the horse, which went down in its stride headlong, and as the Amansador rolled over Charlie fired twice at him. One shot or the other evidently took effect, for the Amansador did not get up again.

We had no difficulty in escaping the Mexicans for they were too busy with the wounded Amansador. We rode like mad-men. I had taken the bridle of Charlie's horse in my hand and he held himself on the horse as well as

he could. He was very weak, and I had to use all my energy to get him to the camp. So that was all that was left of our good sport—a lot of bad blood.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WORK IN CAMP: BRANDING

I find that I have forgotten to tell anything about the work in camp when we were buying and getting the cattle together in the neighborhood of the Rio Grande on the Mexican border. Of course, our camp was always pitched near a creek, water being the first requisite both for the cattle and for ourselves. The next thing to do was either to make a large corral or hire one, and this large corral had several minor ones attached to it, some of them characteristic and peculiar. For instance, there was the branding corral, a chute leading into a very narrow passage with slip bars at the farther end. Once in it, the cow or steer could not turn but could only go straight on, and was stopped by the slip bars in front till we chose to let the beast out. The branding was of the simplest. The branding tool was just a wooden handle with a piece of iron, with the initials on the end of the iron, but how it could burn! This iron was thrust into the fire until it was red-hot, and then one stood close

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to the rails while the cow or steer or calf was driven in: the moment he was in, the branding iron was plucked from the fire, and, white hot, placed against his flank till it sizzled through the skin. The work seems unpleasant in the telling, but a moment's reflection told us that the cattle did not suffer much, it was only like burning through one's skin, painful perhaps for the moment, but not serious. The pain, however, called forth the nature of the beast in most characteristic fashion.

A steer would come in, and as soon as the branding iron was put upon him, would swerve to get away from it. When he found he could not get away he would cower down, or perhaps content himself with kicking or throwing his eyes round for a wicked hook with his sharp horns. In only one thing were all the animals agreed, that was, to get out of the branding pen as soon as the slip bars were lowered: in fact, nine out of ten of them jumped over the bars as soon as the top one was let down and they had only to clear about five feet to get out. Sometimes they got hung up halfway over, not able to get either backward or forward, till the next bar was loosened to let them out. But one and all were eager to get out, and some of them really did extraordinary things in their excitement.

The corral bars, and the bars of the branding pen were usually run up to six feet six, the top slip rail was really just as high, but it was seldom put in, and even when it was in I have again and again seen cows or steers as soon as the hot iron was placed on the hip, rear straight up in the air and hurl themselves over the top bar; perhaps they would fall on it; but the impulse was sufficient to carry them into comparative peace.

I remember one case, near Albuquerque, in which Bent was branding and Charlie standing about with Paul, the nigger, when a steer went up with such force that he carried away the whole of the outside of the corral and came down with all the slip bars on top of Charlie and the nigger, tossing himself and them in among the ashes of the fire. Here Bent got burnt as satisfactorily as if he had been a steer, on a well-covered part of his body. I never heard anything like the cursing that went on till the steer shook himself loose of the bars, and with his tail in the air made Derby time across the prairie to join his fellows. Of course, the rest of us shouted with laughter: it was the height of humor to see Bent with his hand on his hip and Paul and Charlie dancing about like madmen.

Sometimes the cattle seemed dazed with pain; but we all looked upon the branding as merely a momentary sting, because five minutes after they were let out they were eating, as a rule, and whisking their tails about to keep the flies off as if nothing had happened.

But now and then one would come across a hypersensitive beast and some excitement would result. I have seen a cow the moment she was let out of the branding pen turn savagely on her persecutors and make us run for our lives, skipping into the corral while she rushed about chasing one after the other, frantically lowing, meantime, her rage and hate. I have seen a cow go as far as to attack the fire and scatter it all over the prairie, or another charge again and again into the corral as if she meant to uproot the solid posts. I say cows, for I don't think I ever saw a steer turn to bay: as soon as he got a chance of getting out he took it and forgot his in-

juries. The feminine nature seemed to be both less patient and more vindictive. I have seen savage bulls again and again, who would fight till they were shot dead, but I never saw any bull as savage as a mad cow, nor half as dangerous.

For though most bull-fighters don't know it, a cow can be a much worse antagonist than a bull: her shoulders are much lighter, and she can swing her head much further round and much quicker. A bull's rush, too, carries him a hundred yards past you, whereas a cow only goes ten or fifteen yards, and nips round in half the time a bull would take. Altogether an infinitely better equipped and more dangerous adversary is the cow though not so powerful. Yet the boys made fun of bulls and cows alike.

I remember well the first time I was introduced to this feature of our daily life. I had been away somewhere, and came up on horseback about eleven o'clock in the morning on a tired pony, and found the men standing about inside the corral; one of them, indeed, had mounted, while a cow was ranging up and down outside. Again and again she charged at the men, and was only stopped by the posts and bars. One of them called out to me (I think it was Wild Bill Hickok):

"I say, sonny, drive this cow back to the herd, will you?"

I naturally did what I was told, though my broncho was tired: I rode up to her and treated her to a good cut with the whip, and a vigorous "Holloa!" Like lightning she wheeled round and came straight for me. My horse had only just time to jump aside, and she streamed past with her nose on the very ground. Before I had time to

grasp the situation she had swung round, and charged me again. I let her have the whip as she came, right across the head; but she paid no more attention to it than if it had been a gnat, and I had just time to swing my horse away from her horns. It was getting a serious game, for the mad brute did not go more than ten yards before she pulled up, swung round and charged again. Again I got out of her way, and now I began to realize that I was in for half-an-hour's amusement for the boys had all climbed up on the corral and were engaged in encouraging me.

"Rope her; she'll follow you!" shouted one.

"I'll back the cow," said another.

"Five dollars she chases him before long," said another.

In five minutes, I found that the game was growing dangerous: I was on an ordinary broncho, who was too tired to play his part; the savage rushes of the mad cow had already unnerved him and were beginning to frighten him. I knew that the proper thing to do was to take a turn out on the prairie and let her follow me for a hundred yards; but at the moment, I felt ashamed to do it, not realizing that the boys by chaffing me about it were preventing me from taking the only safe course. As soon as I understood this I said:

"Good-by, boys, I am going for a ride," and I headed out on the prairie. My broncho was immensely relieved at being allowed to stretch his legs; but when we had gone two or three hundred yards I was astonished to find that the mad cow was not far from his tail. I made a pretty wide circuit, however, and came back, and again the rushings and dodgings took place, till my broncho was in

a lather from head to foot, and the men were clinging on to the top rail to prevent themselves falling off through laughing. I rode round the corral, I rode everywhere; nothing could shake the mad beast off. I had cut her twice or three times, badly, with the whip: she paid no attention. At last I saw that the struggle must terminate sooner or later by my broncho making a mistake, so I drew my revolver and killed the cow.

The boys seemed to think this very unfair, but Charlie told me afterwards that that was how he would have begun the contest. I found out too, by talking with Reece, that even Bob said a mad cow was beyond human skill.

"No way except kill 'em," he said, "kill 'em quick. They not get better; they get worse all the time. Mad cows much worse than bulls: much worse than snakes: worse nor anything."

The more I learnt about cattle, the more completely I agreed with him.

CHAPTER IX

RAIDING CATTLE IN MEXICO

I suppose we were a month or so near the Mexican border doing little or nothing; cattle continued to come in but in small bunches only, and I soon tired of the perpetual petty bargaining.

Suddenly it came to me that now was the time to cross the border and visit the Vidals at their hacienda near El Paso. The Vidals were the wealthy Spaniards I had met in Chicago. It was their beautiful daughter who had charmed me away from the life of a hotel manager to that of a cowboy. She had filled my young head with romance by flirting with me ever so little in Chicago. I was determined to seek her out.

I had a long talk with Bob. He thought the whole story "damn foolishness"—but hinted at something to be done with cattle. I did not know what he meant, but learned later. When we got near El Paso I sent Bob to the ranch to find out how matters stood. He came back with the news that Miss Vidal was betrothed to her cousin

Arriga and that the marriage was already announced. In short, she was going to marry the other fellow.

Of course, I was disappointed, but I had not seen the girl for months and the first impression had worn off. Besides Bob, too, began to interest me. He wanted to know what I would give him if he got me two or three thousand head of cattle for nothing. After laughing a good deal and joking I said I'd give him one dollar a head, to which he agreed. I found Bent and Charlie enthusiastic about the plan and Reece allowed them to join us. We would have to go one hundred miles down the Rio Grande.

The next morning before sunrise we started out and rode steadily to the southeast. We carried enough food for two or three days. Bob saw to that without any question, but generally he brought us about eight o'clock near some house or other where we could get food and shelter. His knowledge of the whole frontier was as uncanny as his knowledge of cattle.

On the fourth or fifth day about nine in the morning he stopped us by a little wooded height looking over a gorge of the river. To the left the river spread out almost to a shallow lake, and one did not need to be told that a little lower down there must be one or more fords where cattle could cross almost without wetting themselves.

Bob got off his horse in a clump of cottonwood trees which he said was a good place to camp without being seen. I asked him where the cattle were and he told me, "across the river." Within two or three miles, it appeared, there was a famous *hacienda* with great herds. As soon as it got dark he proposed to go across and find

out all about it and bring us the news. We were to be careful not to be seen and he hoped that we would not even make a fire but lie close till he returned.

We were more than willing, and when we got tired of talking Bent produced an old deck of cards and we played draw poker or euchre or casino for two or three hours. The first night passed quickly enough. We had been in the saddle for ten hours a day for four or five days and slept a dreamless sleep. Bob did not return that day or the next and on the third day Bent began to curse him, but I felt sure he had good reason for the delay and so waited with what patience I could muster. On the third night he was suddenly with us just as if he had come out of the earth.

"Welcome back," I cried. "Everything right?"

"Everything," he said: "It was no good coming sooner; they have brought some cattle within four miles of the river; the orders are to keep 'em away seven or eight miles, so that they could not be driven across without rousing the whole country; but Don José is very rich and carefree and there is a herd of fifteen hundred that will suit us not three miles from the river and guarded only by two men. I'll make them so drunk they'll hear nothing till next morning. A couple of bottles of *aguardiente* will do the business, and I'll come back for you to-morrow night by eight or nine o'clock."

It all turned out as Bob had arranged. The next night he came to us as soon as it was dark. We rode some two miles down the river to a ford, splashed through the rivulets of water and came out on the Mexican side. In single file and complete silence we followed Bob at a lope for perhaps twenty minutes, when he put up his

hand and we drew down to a walk. There below us between two waves of prairie were the cattle.

In a few words Bob told Bent and Charlie what they were to do. Bent was to stay behind and shoot in case we were followed—unlikely but always possible. Charlie and I were to move the cattle towards the ford, quietly all the way if we could, but if we were pursued, then as hard as we could drive them.

For the first half hour all went according to program. Charlie and I moved the cattle together and drove them over the waves of prairie towards the river; it all seemed as easy as eating and we had begun to push the cattle into a fast walk when suddenly there was a shot in front and a sort of stampede! At once Charlie shot out on the left as I shot out on the right and using our whips, we quickly got the herd into motion again, the rear ranks forcing the front ones on; the cattle were soon pressed into a shuffling trot and the difficulty seemed overcome. Just at that moment I saw two or three bright flames half a mile away on the other side of Charlie and suddenly I heard the zipp of a bullet pass my own head and turning, saw pretty plainly a man riding fifty yards away from me. I took very careful aim at his horse and fired and was delighted to see horse and man come down and disappear. I paid no further attention to him and kept on forcing the pace of the cattle. But Charlie was very busily engaged for two or three minutes because the fusillade was kept up from behind till he was joined by Bent and shortly afterwards by Bob. We were all now driving the cattle as hard as they could run, straight towards the ford. The shots behind us continued and even grew more frequent, but we were not further

molested till three-quarters of an hour later we reached the Rio Grande and began urging the cattle across the ford. There progress was necessarily slow. We could scarcely have got across had it not been that about the middle Bob came up and made his whip and voice a perfect terror to the beasts in the rear.

When we got them out on the other side I began to turn them westwards towards our wooded knoll, but the next moment Bob was beside me shouting: "Straight ahead, straight ahead! They are following us and we shall have to fight. You get on with the herd always straight north, and I'll bring Charlie back to the bank so as to hold 'em off."

Boylike, I said I would rather go and fight, but he said: "You go on. If Charlie killed, no matter. I want you." And I had perforce to do what the little devil ordered.

When Texan cattle have been brought up together the largest herd can be driven like a small bunch. They have their leader and they follow him religiously and so one man can drive a thousand head with very little trouble.

For two or three miles I kept them on the trot and then I let them gradually get down to a walk. I did not want to lose any more of them; some fat cows had already died in their tracks through being driven so fast.

About two o'clock in the morning I passed a loghouse and soon an American rode up beside me and wanted to know who I was, where I had brought the cattle from and where I was going? I told him the owner was behind me, and the boys and I were driving them straight ahead because some Greasers had been interfering with us.

"That's the shooting I heard," he said. "You have driven them from across the river; haven't you?"

"I've driven them from the river," I replied; "some of them were getting a drink."

I could feel him grin, though I was not looking at him.

"I guess I'll see your friends pretty soon," he said, "but this raiding is bad business. Them Greasers 'll come across and give me trouble. We border-folk don't want a fuss hatched up by you foreigners!"

I placated him as well as I could; but at first was unsuccessful. He didn't say much, but he evidently intended to come with me to the end because wherever I rode, I found him right behind the herd when I returned.

Day had broken when I let the cattle halt for the first time.

I reckoned I had gone twelve miles from the ford and the beasts were foot-sore and very tired; more and more of them requiring the whip in order to keep up even a walk.

I bunched them together and came back to my saturnine acquaintance.

"You are young to be at this game," he said. "Who is your boss?"

"I don't keep a boss," I answered, taking him with hostile scrutiny. He was a man about forty, tall and lean with an enormous quid of tobacco in his left cheek—a typical Texan.

His broncho interested me; instead of being an Indian pony of thirteen hands or so it was perhaps fifteen and a half and looked to be three-quarters bred.

"A good horse you have there," I said.

"The best in the hull country," he replied. "Easy."

"That's only your conceit," I retorted. "The mare I am on right now can give him a hundred yards in a mile."

"You don't want to risk any money on that, do you?" he remarked.

"Oh, yes," I smiled.

"Well, we can try it out one of these days, but here comes your crowd," and indeed, although I had not expected them, in five minutes Bent and Bob and Charlie rode up.

"Get the cattle going," cried Bob, as he came within ear shot. "We must go on. The Mexicans have gone back but they will come right after us again. Who is this?" he added, ranging up beside the Texan.

"My name is Locker," said my acquaintance, "and I guess your raiding will set the whole border boiling. Can't you buy cattle decently, like we all have to?"

"How do you know how decently we paid for them?" cried Bent, thrusting forward his brown face like a weasel's, his dog teeth showing.

"I guess Mr. Locker is all right," I cried, laughing; "I propose he should help us and take two or three hundred head as payment, or the value of them—"

"Now you're talking," said Locker. "I call that sense. There is a herd of mine about a mile further on; if two or three hundred of your José steers join it, I can't hinder 'em; but I'd rather have dollars; cash is scarce!"

"Are they herded?" asked Bob.

"Sure," replied Locker. "I am too near the river to let any cattle run round loose though nobody has interfered with me in the last ten years."

Bob and I began moving the cattle on leaving Bent with Locker to conclude the negotiations. In an hour we had found Locker's herd that must have numbered at least six thousand head and were guarded by three

herdsmen. He had also a couple of boys, sons of his, whom he could send to rouse some of the neighboring farmers if the need was urgent. It turned out that we had done well to be generous to him for he knew the whole of the country-side like a book and was a good friend in our need.

Late in the afternoon, Locker was informed by one of his sons, a youth of about sixteen, that twenty Mexicans had crossed the river and would be up to us in a short time. Locker sent him after the younger boy to round up as many Texans as possible but before they could be collected, a bunch of Greasers, twenty or so, in number, rode up and demanded the return of the cattle. Bent and Locker put them off and as luck would have it, while they were arguing, three or four Texans came up, and one of them, a man of about forty years of age named Rossiter, took control of the whole dispute. He told the Mexican leader, who said he was Don Luis, a son of Don José, that if he stayed any longer he would probably be arrested and put in prison for raiding American territory and threatening people. The impudence of it made us all grin.

The Mexican seemed to have a good deal of pluck, and declared that he would not only threaten but carry out his threat. Rossiter told him to wade right in. The loud talk began again, and a couple more Texans came up and the Mexican leader realizing that unless he did something at once he would be too late, started to circle round the cattle, no doubt thinking that if he did something his superior numbers would scare us.

In five minutes the fight had begun. In ten more it was all over. Nothing could stand against the deadly

shooting of the Westerners. In five minutes two of the Mexicans had been killed and several wounded; half a dozen horses had gone down; it was perfectly evident that the eight or ten of us were more than a match for the twenty Mexicans, for except Don Luis, none of them seemed to have any stomach for the work, and Luis got a bullet through his arm in the first five minutes. Finally they drew off threatening and yelling and we saw no more of them.

After the battle we all adjourned to Locker's and had a big drink. Nobody took the fight seriously; whipping Greasers was nothing to brag about; but Rossiter thought that a claim should be made against the Mexican Government for raiding United States territory: said he was going to draw up the papers and send them to the State District Attorney at Austin. The proposal was reached with whoops and cheers. The idea of punishing the Mexicans for getting shot while trying to recapture their own cattle appealed to us Americans as something intensely humorous. All the Texans gave their names solemnly as witnesses, and Rossiter swore he would draw up the document. Years afterwards Bent whom I met by chance, told me that Rossiter had got twenty thousand dollars on that claim from the American Government.

Three days later we began to move our cattle eastward to join Reece, our boss. I gave one hundred dollars as a reward to Locker's two boys who had helped us from start to finish most eagerly.

A week or so later we got back to the main camp. I found I had now as many cattle as Reece, though my 2,500 head had not cost me more than $3,000, whereas

his had cost him more than the double. But he never referred to it, and I took care to pay Bob, Bent and Charlie without asking Reece to contribute.

But, to go ahead of my story, those ill-gotten cattle brought nothing but misfortune. The Indians got many of them on the trail, hundreds were burned in the Chicago Fire and, in all, they were marked from the start while the others, honestly earned, came through beautifully—merely restating what we learned in our childhood, that honesty is the best policy.

CHAPTER X

CAMP KNOCKOUTS

As soon as we had all the cattle branded, our own and the ones we "rustled" from the Mexicans, there was nothing to do but start on the long trail to the North.

We wanted the cattle to get fat, and so we did not drive them more than ten miles a day. For over a month we got on pretty well. Occasionally, almost from the beginning, we had trouble with Indians. Half a dozen here or a dozen there would try to cut some cattle out and drive them off. But when they found that our horses were far faster than their ponies, and that we were much better shots than they were, they would drop the attempt at stealing and we would drive the cattle back to the herd. For weeks this work continued in absolute monotony.

In these fat peaceful days a peculiar characteristic of human nature showed itself. As the life grew dull and monotonous, so the irritability and ill-temper of the men increased. The labor was not heavy enough to exhaust young men; it is true we were often in the saddle seventeen hours a day, often wore out five or six

horses; but that did not tire us in the slightest degree, for usually we were moving at a walk. Of course, when a cow took it into her head to wander, or a calf ran out of the herd, she had to be driven back on the lope or gallop; but these were only episodes. The monotony of the occupation, the sameness of day after day of brilliant sunshine and great heat, and night after night of unbroken quiet, got on the nerves. Besides, we had nothing but meat to eat; the flour had given out, as it usually did towards the end of the journey, and we had meat and coffee in the morning, meat and coffee in the middle of the day, and meat and coffee at night. After a week of it, we would have welcomed a storm, a stampede, a row, anything to break the exasperating sameness of life.

I remember how surprised I was when I first realized the amount of hate there is in men, how much more characteristic hate and fear are than love and trust. It came about in this way. I had always had the idea that the two strongest men, physically, in our crowd were Charlie and Paul, the nigger. Charlie was six feet one, and well-made, and had an air of swagger that carried conviction; he was always willing, too, to bring any and every dispute to an immediate settlement. Paul, I imagine, was even stronger: he was just six feet, and, stripped, a statue of bronze. Out of curiosity one day I measured him, and found him forty-seven inches round the chest: he weighed, I suppose close to 210 pounds, without an ounce of superfluous flesh on his body. But Paul was the essence of good temper, difficult to provoke, and so I left him out of my calculation.

I had noticed a good many times that the older men

did not like Charlie. I could not forget that neither Wild Bill nor Bent would help him against the young bloods at Taos; they drew off and left him to his fate with a sort of malignant pleasure, which at the time filled me with indignation. I was soon to find out that their ill-feeling towards Charlie was even deeper than I had imagined.

We had camped as usual one evening a couple of hundred yards from the bank of a creek: a couple of men were quietly keeping the herd together when Peggy, the Indian cook, called the rest of us to supper. There was some buffalo hump and liver, washed down with what he called "coffee." It was perhaps nine o'clock. We had been at it since four in the morning, the sun had just gone down, and the air, as we came northward, grew cooler. This particular evening it seemed to have a certain bite in it, and the fire which Peggy had lit was very grateful. Charlie had taken a buffalo robe out of the wagon, put it down by the side of the fire, and thrown himself on it, his whole length turned to the blaze; he was taking his ease leaning on his elbow, with the coffee in one hand and a piece of meat in the other when Bent came up.

"Take your feet up, Charlie," he said; "there's too much of you."

"Oh, hell!" replied Charlie, more out of lazy good-humor than offensively, "Can't you find another place?"

"This'll do for me," said Bent; and without further to-do he threw himself down on Charlie's legs. The shock was enough to have broken the bones. Charlie squirmed and jumped, and in the effort threw the hot coffee in his own face.

"Damn you!" he said, sitting up, "I might have broken my leg."

"Give me my coffee," said Bent to Peggy, paying no more attention to Charlie than if he had been a child.

Peggy, always eager to oblige, handed Bent the hot coffee.

"That's it, is it?" cried Charlie, as Bent took the cup; and with a quick movement he kicked Bent's coffee into his face. "That'll larn you," he said, and swung up on his knees, but before he could get further, before any one could move or think, Bent hurled himself on him, both hands at his throat, and thrust Charlie's head down in the flames. Charlie struck wildly once or twice; but the burning of his hair made him realize that he had got to turn round or be burnt savagely, even though in turning round he might get his face burnt. He whirled round, but Bent held on, and tried to keep his face down in the fire. I jumped up to separate them, but Reece held me back.

"Leave them alone," he said, "they have wanted it for a long time."

The next moment the fire was scattered by Charlie thrusting his hands in it, and pushing himself upon his knees, Bent still clinging to him.

Now, I thought, with joy, Bent will get his deserts; the assault had seemed to me shameful and unprovoked, and all my sympathies were with Charlie. But just as Charlie got on his knees, Bent let go his neck, and leaning back hit him under the jaw as hard as ever he could. Charlie went down with a thud, and for a moment my heart stopped: I thought it was all over with him, but fortunately, the chances of fighting seldom run all one way: as Bent attempted to follow Charlie, to hit him

when he was getting up again, his foot caught in the buffalo rug, and he landed on his ear on the other side of the fire.

A moment later Charlie had risen to his feet and the two men faced each other. The fight, it seemed to me, would not be a long one. It looked like Dempsey against Carpentier. Bent was not a bit more than five feet eight in height, and seemed quite slim beside Charlie, but somehow or other he was harder. He knew the game, too, better than Charlie, and, above all, he had the hardened determination of the older man. Again and again Charlie rushed him with blows heavy enough to have killed him, but the blows for the most part were spent on the air, and again and again Bent landed savagely, now on the face, now on the body, each blow given with every ounce of weight and strength and venom that Bent had in him. It was a fine example of quick, straight hitting as against a rushing fighter. In ten minutes it was clear that nothing but a miracle could save Charlie from being badly beaten, when to the surprise of every one the miracle happened; one of his whirling blows happened to catch Bent under the jaw and knocked him down. To our astonishment, and to Charlie's astonishment, he did not stir or attempt to get up. The blow had been placed by chance as well as a cunning prize-fighter could have placed it. It had been delivered as a sort of uppercut, and had caught Bent right on the point of the jaw, and he was knocked out decisively. Charlie went over to him.

"I ought to kick you to pieces," he said. "Get up, damn yuh!"

Still Bent did not move. I ran and got water, and threw it on him, and had time to get whisky, too, and

pour some between his lips before he came to: even then he did not speak. But the impression made by his swift, straight blows and his deadly implacable resolution still subsisted. No one needed to be told that Charlie would try to avoid the next quarrel. Everybody felt that there might well be another row, and if so, Charlie would be lucky to come out of it as well as he had come out of this bout. Even Charlie seemed to feel this, for he was full of explanations, even to me.

"What did he throw himself on my legs for? He came near breaking them. . . . I didn't hit him on purpose like that, you know. It was just chance. But it was a good one, warn't it?"

Something fatuous, foolish, in the man came to the surface. Bent never spoke a word; but the blow must have been terribly heavy. The next morning he was still white, and it was fully a week before he came to look his brown mahogany self.

The issue of the fight surprised me. I could not help saying so to Reece, who, however, saw nothing surprising in it.

The next time I got Wild Bill alone I asked him his opinion; for none of these men would discuss such a thing with others present. You had to get each of them alone before you could get his opinion on any personal matter, and then he gave it guardedly, warily, as one who did not want to make trouble through careless speech. "A loose-mouth," to those men, was one of the epithets of lowest contempt.

"Weren't you surprised at the result?" I asked Wild Bill. "I thought Charlie could have killed Bent."

"Get out!" said Bill. "Bent has hate enough in him

to eat Charlie. Charlie's too good-natured and young: he's soft and foolish, like a puppy. Bent would kill him with any weapon. Bent's the most dangerous thing in this camp, I guess."

The fight between Bent and Charlie set me thinking. It was not a solitary episode: a week or so afterwards when playing cards Bent and Wild Bill had a word which seemed to me fraught with danger; but Reece interfered in the nick of time and the storm blew over. Bent and Paul, too, nearly came to blows one noontide. Bent said plainly he would not play euchre with him, and Paul went ashen with rage under the insult, while Wild Bill poured oil on the fire by remarking coolly that he "didn't hold with niggers anyway." There was such disdainful contempt in the few words that Paul's answer that there were white niggers as well as black passed almost unnoticed.

The temper of the men was getting as bad as could be. I sought some means of mitigating the savagery, but for some time vainly. Finally a solution appeared.

CHAPTER XI

BUFFALO-HUNTING

One morning, hunting with Bob, we came across a little herd of buffalo with half a dozen calves, and it suddenly occurred to me that it would be great fun if we could catch one or two of the calves so I proposed it to Bob. He said:

"I catch any one you like, big or little."

"Oh," I said, "let's catch the yearlings for choice, or the two-year-olds!"

And the next moment we were riding fiercely down on the herd, intent on cutting out two yearling bull calves that were about half-grown; but it was easier to try this than to do it. As soon as we came close to the herd the calves sought to get inside, leaving us the bull and one or two of the older cows to deal with, and after a dozen efforts we found it impossible to get the bull away.

I cried to Bob, "Shall I shoot him?" He nodded, and almost at the same moment Bob and I drew and fired our revolvers into the bull's side. Bob had aimed at the flank, while I fired behind the shoulder. He came down on his head; we drew aside and left him; but when we came up with the herd again, we still found it difficult

to get at the calves to cut them out; I had to shoot a cow before Bob managed to get inside and throw his lariat around the horns of the bull calf. As soon as the noose settled round the neck Bob pulled his pony up quietly, and when the bull calf came to the end of his tether, he was simply whirled to the ground on his back, with almost force enough to dislocate his neck; but as a matter of fact, he was only stunned for a moment or two. I had just time to nip off and hobble his forelegs and his hindlegs with straps when he gave me a most ferocious butt in the side as he scrambled to his feet. Of course Bob had already loosened the lariat round his neck; had transferred the noose, indeed, to his horns, and had mounted preparatory to leading or dragging him.

"We must bring him back to camp," I said, "but what a pity it is that you didn't get another, and we might have had races."

The idea had come into my head at the moment, and I welcomed it for I felt sure a bit of sport would amuse the boys and bring about a better state of feeling.

"You stick to this one," said Bob. "I'll soon bring another!"

The next moment he had changed my rope for his, and gone off at a full gallop. The buffalo were just disappearing; but I knew Bob well enough to know that he would not promise anything he could not perform, so I left him to the job, having my hands full for the moment with the bull calf. As soon as the little brute had recovered from the shock, he came for my pony as hard as he could lick, and I had to throw him down a dozen times with Bob's lariat before he learnt that there was no sense in racing at me. To stop his rushing was one thing,

to drag him towards the camp was another. The brute lay back on the lariat like an Irish pig, shaking his big round bullet head, but would not move. Again and again I dragged him on to his nose. I had not got him four hundred yards away from the place where he was captured in the next hour, and both I and my broncho were in a lather and fairly done.

All of a sudden I was struck through with wonder; this is what amazed me: Bob loping towards me with another calf, a little older, if anything, than mine, following at the end of his lariat as if he had done nothing but follow all his buffalo life. When Bob came up to me I was disgusted.

"What is it?" he asked.

"This damned calf won't follow, and I can't drag him," I said.

"Give him me," said Bob, "he follow."

"But you can't take both," I grumbled.

"You take mine," said Bob, "he'll follow you now; yours'll follow me."

We changed and Bob was right: my bull calf, after shaking his head once or twice, followed Bob with occasional revolts, whereas Bob's calf followed me quite quietly, having been tamed somehow or other. We arranged the races for the next morning.

The first race was for fifty dollars apiece between myself and Charlie. I had my tough customer of the day before; greatly to my disgust he fell to my lot instead of the quieter one, as I thought, not realizing my good fortune. They were held somewhere near a line by the lariats of Reece and Wild Bill on a loose slip. Charlie vaulted on his calf which at once turned into a holy

terror; he set off across the prairie as hard as he could lay legs to ground. I heard a shout of laughter behind me, and catching hold of my mount's mane, turned round just in time to see Charlie rolling ignominiously on the ground. But the heart of the fun was that as soon as the calf he had been riding saw him on the ground it turned and butted at him fiercely, amid the yells and the laughter of the boys. I slid off my buffalo at once, letting him be retrieved by the Boss, and went back to Charlie who, on foot, was still avoiding the rushes of the bull calf. Of course, Wild Bill or Bob ought to have caught the calf; but neither of them attempted to till I called Bob, who then swung his lariat nonchalantly over the calf's horns and put an end to the entertainment.

Bob beat me very nearly as easily as I had beaten Charlie. It was not difficult to sit the calf. The hair of the little beast on the shoulders was already long and thick, and if there had been any question about it I would have undertaken to have ridden my calf for a month, even when he stopped and backed and kicked about.

The curious part of the matter was that the calves seemed to have changed natures. My black calf of the day before was growing tamer, whereas Bob's comparatively tame calf turned into a holy terror after we tried to ride him: the little brute would have nothing to do with the game at any price. Finding it could not dislodge me easily, it stood shaking its bullet head heedless of all my attempts to move it, and then suddenly without warning, threw itself down on the ground and rolled: I stepped off at almost the right moment; but the impetus was too great, and I went down in a long stumble. I had just got to my legs when the little brute charged

me. Of course it was not difficult to step aside, and a moment or two afterwards Wild Bill's lariat settled down over its horns and held it in comparative quiet. But it was a perfect little demon, untamable, not through fear; but through rage and hate; indeed, it was frightened of nothing: it would charge a man on horseback just as willingly as a man on foot, and it remained as wild, even after it had been a week in the camp.

Nothing would satisfy the boys till they had got Bob to ride "The Gray Terror," as we christened the lighter-colored calf. Bob came over to him and let himself be smelt; but the moment he got quite close the calf fairly leapt at him, and we all yelled with laughter as Bob jumped back. The next moment he was thrown on his back and the lariat loosed and the fun began. The calf curvetted and kicked and pranced, throwing foam from its jaws in a perfect hysteria of rage. Bob sat quite still on it. Suddenly it occurred to the calf that its old trick was the way of release, and the next moment down it went, and rolled over and over. Bob was chucked off, and had all he could do to avoid the first rush, and after that we gathered round to see the fun. But when Bob had avoided it three or four times it suddenly turned and made for Paul, who was laughing at Bob's antics, and before the big negro could move aside the calf caught him fairly on the thighs and pitched him clean over its shoulders. It went on to charge round the circle, and soon had us all running. We had to rope it down to keep it quiet.

We kept the calves with us for a week or two, and had great fun with them, until first one was killed for food, and then the other; but they brought us over the worst

part of our journey in good humor, and that was something to be thankful for.

One of the worst experiences we had was when we came through the Salt Valley of the Cimmarion. Here there was salt in powder nearly ten miles across. Naturally the hoofs of the cattle threw up clouds of salt that got into our eyes and mouths. In an hour we had all sore eyes and bleeding lips and noses, and the cattle were not in much better state.

For days afterwards we took it easy.

CHAPTER XII

SURROUNDED BY REDSKINS

The fact that some of the cattle were mine made me a most watchful and indefatigable herdman. More than once my vigilances, sharpened by Bob's instinct, made a difference to our fortunes. When we began to skirt the Indian Territory, Bob warned me that a small band or even a single Indian might try some night to stampede the herd. Once I noticed that the cattle were uneasy.

"Indians!" said Bob when I told him the signs, "Cunning beasts!"

That night I was off duty, but was on horseback, circling round as usual, when about midnight I saw a white figure leap from the ground with an unearthly yell. The cattle began to run together so I raised my rifle and fired at the Indian and though I didn't hit him, he thought it better to drop the sheet and decamp. In five minutes we had pacified the cattle again and nothing unfortunate happened that night, though plenty did a little later.

We had reached a forest of scrub oak, a few drives above the Salt Valley of the Cimmaron. It lay about three miles away from the trail to the right and was in itself so extraordinary that I could not help galloping across to have a look at it. I found the trees from five to ten feet in height, perfect oaks in every particular. They grew as closely together as yews could grow that are meant to be made into a hedge. It was, in fact, an impenetrable thicket that would have turned mad bulls or motor-buses without damage to itself. The low growth of the trees came from the fact that the strata of earth which bore them was not more than a couple of feet in thickness, and then you came on rock.

For all one day we rode alongside this forest and towards the evening we came across a creek, and prepared to camp on its bank. We had a great deal of Indian trail in the course of the last few days; Charlie and I, indeed, when after buffalo had seen Indians the day before. We were all relieved when Bent told us that there was a safe laager close at hand where a spring was to be found in a sort of bay formed by the oak forest. We could lie there, he said, as long as we liked, for the semicircle of oakwood gave us as complete protection as a fort.

No sooner was a rest made possible to us than it was accepted unanimously. We turned the cattle off the trail and drove them into the deep bay of the oak wood, laagered the two wagons opposite each other with only about three yards between them in the middle of the chord of the arc, just where the spring was, picketed some horses behind us, drove the rest near the cattle and sat down for a week's rest, careless of all the

Comanches in Texas. We soon found that it would have been wiser to have gone on.

The next morning we lay about resting, made Peggy, our Indian cook, bring us our cups of coffee and biscuits where we were lying (we called him "Peggy" you'll recall because we believed all cooks should be women), and thus lazied about the whole livelong day. Nothing was done in the morning; about eleven we repicketed our pet horses so as to give them fresh food and watered them. In the afternoon we played cards for salaries to be earned, poker and euchre, and as the sun sank we wrapped our blankets around us, settled the saddles under our heads and slept the dreamless sleep of youth, and awoke next morning perfectly refreshed.

Some hours after breakfast, perhaps about seven o'clock, Bent proposed to try to get some buffalo or turkey; would I go with him? I was only too glad to consent. We saddled up and started. Bent first proposed, I don't know why, to go down to the creek, which was about half a mile to the right of our camp: we rode down and had a look at the little river: the banks were steep and the creek was perhaps fifty feet across, flowing rather sluggishly: as we rode up to the banks a dozen snakes slid or went plop into the water. We turned and rode along the creek into the open prairie: Bent said:

"That's the weak point!"

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"If Indians attack us," he replied, "they will be able to come down the creek without being seen, out of gunshot and protected by the banks: they might charge and make it hot for us. Still, good shootin's impossible to beat: no advantage of position makes up for that."

"What do you mean?" I cried, intensely excited at the thought of an attack in force by Indians, and all that his words implied.

"In order to shoot at you," he said slowly, "a man must expose his head and hands at least, and if you can hit his head or hands further off then he has a chance of hitting your body I guess he'll draw the short straw every time."

"I see," I cried, "I see; but then I am not a good shot, and Peggy's no good."

"You'll just have to be passengers in the boat," he replied, carelessly. "There are one or two mighty good shots with us, I believe; Charlie's all right, and Bill Hickok's something extraordinary, and, for an Englishman, Reece is no slouch. I guess we'll come out all right. It's wonderful having the wood at your back: it's like a blamed wall, and perhaps the Indians'll get sick of waiting . . ."

"Could no one get through the wood?" I asked.

"From the river banks," he replied, "they'd have six hundred yards to go, and you'd not make fifty yards through that wood in a day, do what you could. I guess the wood's all right."

The prairie in front of the wood was not quite flat, it ran fairly level for perhaps a mile, and then a ridge cut off the view: beyond it was flat again for a mile or so, and then there were ridges running transversely. It was what one would call broken prairies, not regular, and the second lot of ridges, two or three miles from the camp, looked as if the earth had met in waves on some cross sea at some time or other. Towering over the ridges was a

sort of butt, standing out considerably higher than the surrounding country.

After we had ridden a few minutes I asked Bent where he was going:

"I want to get up on that butt if I can," he said, "I guess one can see twenty to thirty miles from there."

We got to the butt and rode about halfway up it, when suddenly Bent stationed me at a point overlooking the whole of the prairie back to the camp and parts of it in front, and said:

"If you see Indians, fire, and don't mind me, but gallop like Sam Hill back to camp. I'll be all right."

"I guess I'll wait for you," I replied carelessly. "Blue Dick can travel a bit faster than your old clothes-horse."

"In ten minutes I'll be back," he said, and loped on up the butt. I noticed that he carried his rifle in his right hand.

I took out my glasses and began sweeping the plain; nothing between me and the camp, nothing anywhere. Bent had vanished over the shoulder of the hill; but suddenly turning round I noticed, or thought I noticed, something moving on the river bank; and then again I saw it, more clearly this time—an Indian on his horse. They were coming out from the lower part of the butt, almost sheltered from me, and dropping over into the river. At once I drew my rifle on the spot as the next Indian passed and fired: no notice was taken; but I pulled Blue Dick together, and began to walk slowly down the hill towards the Indians, but still nearer the camp, and keeping a large piece of hill between myself and them. Two minutes afterwards I was joined by Bent, who was

urging his horse as fast as he could; but Blue Dick in a canter kept up to his furious short gallop.

"Three hundred at least," he said, "never saw such a mob. They mean to get that five thousand head of cattle, sure, and we are five hundred miles from the nearest Fort. Come on like hell."

Since I had fired, the Indians at the foot of the hill had turned and ridden to try to get between us and the camp; but when we got on the level ground they were still half a mile away.

"I wish I could hit one," I said.

"Easy enough," answered Bent; but by the time you did they'd be within five or six hundred yards of you, and a shot might come straight, even from an Indian gun. If they follow us they'll get enough shootin' soon."

As we topped the little ridge which separated us from the mile of flat prairie leading to the camp we saw that the men in the camp had had the alarm: several of them were already lying down under the wagons. As we got within three or four hundred yards of the camp Bent cried:

"Break off to the right." And he shot off at right angles to the course he had been keeping. "Give the boys a chance to shoot." And as we went we turned in our saddles and looked. The Indians had followed us, and had got within perhaps a thousand yards of the camp. At the moment we turned off to the right they pulled up, not quite in time, however. Two or three shots were fired from the camp, and one Indian swayed forward and fell face downward from his pony: another pony, too, screamed in pain, and began rearing with his rider; evidently a couple of the shots had told. At once the

Indians scattered and rode back, and a moment afterwards, when we came into the camp, the prairie in front was empty.

"Three hundred of them," said Bent, getting off his horse, "and they mean business this time; they're after the herd, sure!

"I wish that dog-goned creek was a mile away," cried Reece.

Every one seemed to agree with him.

"Ought we to put a couple of men there?" asked Charlie.

"Well," said Reece, "I'm thinking one man might go to the horn of the wood where it commands the river bank—one, or perhaps two, so that we'd get a cross fire on them."

At once Charlie and Paul, the big negro, went out to the horn of the scrub oak, and I went with them, eager to see the fun. When we got to the horn we found that Reece had seen rightly: this horn or tip of the oak wood commanded the nearest point of the creek to our camp, thanks to the bend in the creek: we could even see the water; but the difficulty was to get shelter.

Paul had brought an ax with him, and he set to work to cut out a sort of sentry-box in the scrub-oak forest. It was like cutting through solid oak. He worked for a couple of hours before he made much impression on it, so tangled were the innumerable branches, so iron-hard the green gnarled wood. But, of course, as soon as the sentry box was made the toughness and impenetrability of the wood were all in our favor; so Paul worked on, while Charlie took himself off up the creek. I went with Charlie, who was intent on stepping off along the creek

till he reached the spot nearest our camp; it was nine hundred and eighty yards from the wood. Charlie proceeded to step further distances up to about twelve hundred yards, and he marked the various ranges by shoving chips of oak wood in the ground. He then stepped his way back to camp, so that they should know the exact distances also. When we took our noon-day meal we felt that everything possible had been done; all of us knew the distances to the creek and wood from six hundred to twelve hundred yards. It looked as if the Indians, when they came, would meet with a hot reception.

Next morning I was awakened by a wild hurly-burly. I started to my feet. One glance showed me what had happened. The Indians had spent the night, or part of it, in leading their ponies down the river to the point just before that bend in it which showed the river to Charlie and Paul from the horn of the forest. They thus got within a mile, perhaps twelve hundred yards, of our wagons unperceived: there were about a hundred of them. As was their custom they waited till just daybreak and then tried to rush the camp. By good luck Peggy, the cook, had got up a little earlier even than usual to prepare the breakfast: it was his cry which woke us all. As I sprang to my feet the Indians were streaming out of the bed of the river on to the prairie; but they were not coming directly towards us; but spreading out as they galloped, evidently with the idea of offering as poor a mark as possible.

Already Bent, Charlie, Reece, Wild Bill and the others were lying down, and as the Indians raced across the first rifles cracked. Immediately the Indian ponies and riders

began to come down. I could hardly help cheering. As soon as the Indians were well apart they galloped straight for the camp. It was their only chance, and against less expert riflemen it must of necessity have won. But eight or nine splendid shots with repeating rifles in their hands and offering no mark themselves, are a terrible force. In spite of the fact that the Indians rode stretched along their ponies, even at a thousand yards two shots out of three told, and every yard they came nearer, they fell thicker. I did not pull trigger; but simply sat and watched the drama, fascinated. At about seven or eight hundred yards it seemed as if the Indians must carry the camp; but still they kept falling, and as Bent said to me afterwards, it was the most resolute, the boldest, who fell. Even at three and four hundred yards the result was still doubtful; but at this distance some of our men stood up and began to fire with their rifles resting on the wagons; as Indian after Indian came to the front he fell, and the others could not press the charge home.

When still a hundred and fifty or two hundred yards away the Redskins lost heart and began to circle round; but this did them little good: pony after pony came down and frequently the one bullet killed both horse and rider.

Everywhere dismounted Indians were running back towards the river, and it was in the retreat, perhaps, that they lost most men, for the cowboys were not inclined to let them off: the cool hate, the murderous vindictiveness were appalling.

Our fellows shot carefully-quickly, malevolently intent on killing as many Indians as they could. Peggy, almost beside himself with excitement, kept up a running

fire of exclamations and shouts; but the Americans were all silent. When the Indians were all on the run, the cowboys still kept at the deadly work. Their exultation showed itself in a sort of grim humor.

"That's my fifth!" said Reece. "Why do they hurry away? We're doing our best to entertain 'em!"

"See me bore that stout fellow through just when he gets to the bank," said Bent. "Watch him now!"

And just as the Indian reached the bank and was about to plunge down it into safety the rifle cracked and he pitched forward rolling over and over—dead.

Suddenly the last Indian disappeared into the creek: here and there lay dead ponies; and in the distance some galloping and others limping away, but for these the plain was empty and silence reigned, broken first by a faint whoop of triumph away on the right from Paul in the wood.

"So they took a hand in the game," said Wild Bill Hickok. "I didn't think of them at the time."

How many Indians were killed we never knew; the survivors always carry off their wounded and dead. But scores were certainly wounded if not killed; not a cowboy was touched. The few Indian bullets which came straight buried themselves harmlessly in the wagons. The whole affair lasted only a few minutes, not longer, certainly, than the account takes to read.

But if the reader will remember that these Indians were more than a match for United States troops—a little later near this very spot three hundred Indians wiped out General Custer and his regiment of over five hundred men—he will understand the supreme value in war of really fine marksmanship.

The repulse was so decisive, the superiority given by the fine shooting of the cowboys was so enormous, that most of us thought at first the Indians would give up the game as a bad job. Over five thousand head of cattle was a big prize, and the older men of the party had no illusions on the matter; Bent was particularly positive.

"That's why I chose this place," he said to me. "Those Indians have been following us for a fortnight and the band's been getting bigger and bigger. You don't get three hundred Indians in one bunch till they mean business. They are going to do all they know to get those cattle."

"Well, Bent," said Charlie, coming across to him with Reece, "Reece and I think we'll have to double the guard at night."

"We'll want four on at least," said Bent.

"You think they'll try again?" remarked the Boss.

"Again and again," Bent replied. "That's why we've come here."

After that we had a rarely exciting time, instead of one man riding about the cattle at night four men were on duty all night, and in the day-time we drove the cattle right out on the prairie to feed; we were practically in the saddle all day long.

The third night was dark and stormy: I was on duty with three others, Paul, Bent, and Peggy. We circled round and round, every half hour or so, circling back when we could have a word or two. The cattle were uneasy, not one that I could see lay down, and the excitement among them seemed to increase. About midnight I saw a figure; but before I could think of getting my rifle up it had disappeared: on the next round I spoke

to Bent, and told him: as he swung his broncho round he said:

"I guess you're right: we'll have trouble."

Suddenly the trouble came: I saw a sort of white thing and heard a yell, and the next moment two or three shots, and then I had to pull aside to get out of the way of the cattle, for they were all stampeding for the camp, half mad with fear. How it had been done I learned afterwards; for the moment I had enough to do to get outside of the mad rush as quickly as I could. I was riding an excellent cow-pony that knew the game as well as I did. He went very fast for about two hundred yards, and then swung off to the right. In a moment, as it seemed, the herd was abreast of us, and then I began galloping down on them: pressing them, shouting, doing my utmost to turn them but they passed over the next mile almost in a dead straight line: I felt the rise of the big ridge plainly and the gallop down the other side, and then, and not till then did we begin to get some control of the half-mad beasts. Half a mile further we had rounded them up and suddenly I found Reece beside me without a coat, just as he had sprung from sleep.

"Be quick," he shouted, "let's get 'em back at once, or we'll lose every head!" The others seemed to have the same instinctive sense of what was needed for hardly had we rounded the cattle up when we started off on the trot back to camp. Again and again I saw figures; Indians probably; but only for a moment; all round the cattle one heard revolver shots: if I did not see plainly enough to shoot, the others did, and the cattle drive became a running fight with the Indians, who again and again tried to stop the herd.

Nothing wilder could be imagined than this ride and fight in the black darkness. At every check of the cattle we shouted and used our whips; but here and there all round there were little spurts of flame, and the sharp crack of revolver or rifle. We had passed the camp when I saw my first Indian surely; Reece had just come up beside me, and I cried:

"Look, look!"

The man seemed to have sprung from the ground ten yards in front of us: as I spoke Reece fired, and the Brave fell; I plucked out my revolver; but there was no need to shoot: a yard or two and we saw him plainly lying on the ground. To my horror Reece fired again, and to my surprise the figure, right under my horse's head, got to his feet and bolted in among the cattle. In a second he had vanished, though probably badly wounded.

"As hard to kill as mosquitoes," said Reece. "Keep the cattle going."

At last we got the cattle into the bay of wood and began circling round them again. In spite of their usual custom, which is only to attack in the day-time, and especially at daybreak or just before nightfall, some Indians we found had attacked the wagons. Charlie and Williams, who had been left in charge, had used their rifles again and again. This information only came to me in bits, towards the morning, as I met one or the other and had time to exchange a word or two.

Before the day dawned I had begun to realize what a sorry lot we all looked. I came across Bent somewhere about four o'clock and asked him what had scared the cattle. He said:

"An Indian who had rubbed the heads of matches on

his hands and across his chest; when he pulled the blanket off and showed his chest the cattle went as if they were mad. But Paul or I hit him: I guess he feels sick this morning."

"Are any of our crowd wounded?" I asked.

"Paul's hurt," he said, "but not badly, and Bill Hickok has had a bad fall. They killed his pony."

When the sun had risen we saw that our loss had been severer than we thought: the Indians had managed to cut off three or four hundred head of cattle; probably in the first rush out one of the small herds had gone off by itself. It was not on my side, I felt sure; but there was no room for blame, for every one had done his best. Besides this some thirty or forty of the horses had gone, which was a more serious loss: they had evidently streamed away in front of the rush, and we, occupied with the cattle, had not noticed them. Breakfast was a dismal meal.

"What's to be done?" said Reece, looking at Bent.

"Well," said Bent, "if you want to save the cattle a couple of us must ride through to Fort Dodge and bring the soldiers. If we don't do that, we'll be worn out in ten days and the redskins'll get the cattle and some of us too."

"I guess that's right," said Charlie. "You thought they meant sticking at first; I didn't; but now they've come to stay. Who'll ride to Dodge?"

"Let's draw lots," said Bent.

"No," returned Reece, "I guess it should be the worst shots." Peggy and I looked at each other in silence.

"They happen to be the lightest, too, and I guess the

young one has nearly as much money in this herd as I have."

"I'm quite ready," I said, "but I'm no good at finding the road."

"You've only to keep straight north," said Reece; "and you are sure to come across Fort Dodge, about the fifth day I should think, with that horse of yours."

"We can't do without Peggy," remarked Wild Bill, suddenly. "If we have to work twenty hours a day we want good food and none of the rest of us here can make a biscuit. I guess some one else'll have to go with the boy."

A silence followed. No one in that camp, except Charlie and myself, ever seemed to talk for the sake of talking, and now every one appeared to recognize that Wild Bill was talking sense. I looked round the camp: it rather amused me, wondering who would propose to come with me. I determined not to speak, though of course I knew that I should prefer Reece. I was delighted when he spoke:

"I think I'd better go along. We have the two fastest horses anyway, and I think we should reach Fort Dodge on the fifth or sixth day, if nothing happens."

That "if nothing happens" which he added startled me: what could happen? Of course, one of us might be shot, or the horses might be shot; but the pause of apprehension was only momentary: the next moment the excitement of the creeping out at night, the mad ride, and the Indians whooping after us blotted everything out. I humped up delighted:

"We'll start to-night, eh?"

Reece looked at me with a quizzical look in his twinkling gray eyes:

"You'll not be in so great a hurry to-morrow night," he said, a trifle grimly. "It isn't a race with the Amansador, you know."

"I guess there's no time to be lost," Bent broke in. "It ain't like waitin' for a dark night: the cattle will have eaten all this off in ten days, and if ye aren't about getting help then, we'll all have to quit."

"Get out!" said Charlie, who was always against Bent when he could get the chance: "the thing is, let Reece go on to Fort Dodge and let the boy turn up the trail. He'll run into some herd along the trail within a day or two, and he may get five or six men to come back for a couple of hundred dollars."

Bent looked at him, but did not reply at first.

"You're funnin', Charlie. You'd get no five men to come back and take it up with three hundred Comanches for the sake of our beauty," and he turned off to the wagons.

In a few minutes every one had gone about his business, and I turned to Reece:

"It'll be such fun going with you," I said. "I'm glad you're coming."

"I couldn't let you go over the prairie alone at night," he said: "God knows where you'd land, probably in the Comanche camp. You'll have to take your racing pad: tie dried beef on one side of it, and on the other your big flask with whisky: we may need it."

"You'll take Shiloh, won't you?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "I think so."

"And I'll take Blue Dick," I cried, half beside myself with excitement.

CHAPTER XIII

BREAKING AN INDIAN BLOCKADE

Very soon it was clear to all of us that the Indian blockade was more than serious, and we must do something quickly to extricate ourselves.

A little later next morning the others drove the cattle on to the prairie, leaving Peggy, Reece and myself in camp, as if by mutual consent.

Our preparations for riding through the blockade did not take long. I got some dried beef and secured it on the racing pad, and so did Reece; I filled my flask with whisky from the little barrel in the wagon, and then I was ready. But Reece was not satisfied. He brought Blue Dick and Shiloh up and began examining them carefully: they were both in perfect form; but he went over them like a veterinary surgeon might have done. He seldom rode Shiloh, always keeping him for a race or an emergency, and he always had light plates on. Reece took up his feet one after the other and examined the plates minutely.

"He's all right," he said at length. "Now for your horse."

"Oh!" I cried, "she's all right: nothing ever hurts her."

And indeed Blue Dick looked the picture of health, from her big bony head and vicious eye down to the large round feet: but Reece took out his bowie and began paring her feet: here and there the horn had broken off: pieces were sticking out: all was pared and put in order with the utmost care.

"You are taking it very seriously," I said to Reece.

He straightened himself and looked at me.

"I'm uncertain whether we should not each take another horse," he said. "Suppose one gets shot."

"The Indians can't shoot," I replied: "Charlie says they can't hit a haystack."

"They shoot very well indeed," Reece answered, "up to a couple of hundred yards; and we'll probably be a great deal nearer than that to them to-night."

"But isn't it possible to go out and reconnoitre and find out where they are and avoid them?" I asked.

"We'll do what we can this afternoon," he said; "but who's to keep them where we locate them? They know as well as we do that unless we break through they'll get the cattle, and they are determined not to let us break through. We have had fine nights, and they must have missed a good many men in the stampede, or they'd have been at that game again."

I suppose it was my boyishness: but the graver he got the more delighted I felt. To Wild Bill, killing Indians was just some more work to do; to me it was breathless adventure. The breaking through seemed to me an immense lark. I was bubbling over with excitement and

eager to set off. When we had done everything necessary we led Blue Dick and Shiloh over towards the horn of the wood where the grass was untouched and picketed them so that they could have a good feed. Then Reece went on to the outpost, apparently to have a word with Charlie.

"How far are they out, Charlie?" asked Reece.

"There's always one devil just above the bend of the river," said Charlie, "and one or two keeping watch. You can see them most any time if you get up that oak," he added, pointing to one behind us; "I guess they're on watch."

Reece swung into the tree, and in a moment or two came down.

"Three of them?" he said, when he rejoined us.

"That's right," said Charlie: "they're just fifty yards beyond my rifle shot, damn them!" I thought of leading the wagon over once, and getting up on the top of it; but the skunks would see the top and go another hundred yards away. If I had to break through," Charlie went on, "I'd ride the horses up the creek about four hundred yards, and then I'd get out on the far side and just let 'em go."

Reece looked at him; but I saw that he did not agree with him. Charlie saw it, too, for he went on argumentatively:

"The main crowd's in the broken ground three miles away right straight out west: there'll always be a hundred of them there, and wherever they hear shooting they'll ride to cut you off, you may be sure. Well, they'll have to ride further if you ride by the extreme wing, won't they? That's why I'd go out at the side."

"I see," said Reece, and turned away. As we walked back I said:

"You don't seem to agree with Charlie?"

"No," he said, "they'll expect us on that side. I should think they've probably formed another camp out there somewhere: that's the direct road to the fort: the back trail's the one for us; if we can get out without being shot at we can ride round them easily enough."

"We can go two feet to their one," I added excitedly.

"For fifty miles perhaps," he said, "but not after that: how much do you think Blue Dick can beat an Indian pony in the second twelve hours?"

"Another forty," I guessed carelessly.

"Not ten," he replied. "Each Indian'll have a couple of ponies and will ride one to death. The worst of it is that if we try to ride round they may get between us and the fort on the second or third day by riding straight for it. I'll have to see Bent and Wild Bill."

We all met again at dinner about noon, except those who were herding the cattle. After the meal was over Reece drew Bent and Wild Bill to one side, and I was allowed to hear what went on. He put the case to them, and to my astonishment they agreed. Charlie, who had evidently reconsidered the position, was in favor of our going to the left on the back trail, Bill's idea, and riding right round the Indians: Bent to my astonishment took this modified view and it carried the day.

"They'll always have a crowd down there on the trail below us," he said: "because that is where the herds are coming from: that's the way immediate help might come at any time; they are sure to have a band of thirty or forty right out there, within a mile of the trail. You

would have to go ten miles south to get round them, and they'll know by three o'clock that you have bolted, even if they don't find out in the night, and you can't afford to give'm twenty miles. You'll have to take the risk and ride straight. I would keep a little to the north so as not to run right on to their bunch; but it's mostly luck."

For the first time the seriousness of the attempt began to be plain to me; if we were to ride right into the Indians not knowing when we should be on the top of them, it was of course going to be dangerous; but still, the excitement overpowered all fear.

The afternoon was simply interminable: Reece lay down to get a sleep immediately after the conference with Wild Bill and Bent; but I could not sleep: I went to the wagon and had a talk with Peggy and then I went over to the horn and had a long talk with Charlie: and he gave me one piece of good advice.

"You take an extra revolver," he said, "and no gun. A rifle's no good to you. But you shoot pretty straight at about thirty yards, and a revolver is a pretty handy weapon if anything happens. Always shoot at the stomach: a short barrel throws high; but if you hit a man in the stomach he'll feel pretty sick. Keep it low, and always pull as the gun's going down."

He went on explaining to me with a gesture.

"When we are riding through," I cried, "if they shoot at us, what should we do?"

"Lie right along your horse," he said, "and go like hell."

The afternoon seemed as if it would never end, but slowly the sun slid down west, and suddenly disappeared; at once there was darkness and coolness.

Reece, it appeared, had made up his mind to go as quickly as possible: the sun had not been down an hour when we led the horses to the creek and mounted just as we got down the bank by the water's edge.

"Follow me," he said, and I followed.

He went up the creek about four hundred yards, and then taking advantage of a dip in the ground walked Shiloh out on to the right-hand bank. I got up beside him; but I found to my astonishment that he meant to walk, and in a whisper he told me why.

"With the oak wood behind us," he said, "and the ground sloping up we can see them as far away as they can see us, perhaps further. Keep well behind, and follow close."

I drew Blue Dick back to Shiloh's tail, and followed silently.

The excitement was intense: my heart seemed to be beating in my head, in my fingers, and in my legs all at once: but I kept hold of myself and did just what Reece did. We had gone perhaps half a mile when I heard an exclamation away on the left: Reece must have heard it too, for he turned at right angles to it and moved away straight north. We went on for about half or three-quarters of a mile in this direction when we stopped dead, and when I came beside him he took hold of me and pointed in front and a little to the right. I could see nothing.

"We'll have to ride," he whispered. "They have picketed every inch of the ground in front."

The next moment he had put spurs in, and we were racing into the dark as hard as our horses could go. In the first jump I had come alongside him and I kept there

pretty easily: for if Shiloh was a little faster in a sprint, I offset that by weighing less than Reece.

We had only gone, it seemed, a moment, when the first shots came from our right, and then a moment later I thought I saw a figure on my left, and fired at it with my revolver; I saw a flash and heard a report which seemed to make Blue Dick go quicker. Whether Blue Dick had been grazed by a bullet I could not tell. Fear in my heart, I hoped not. Then there was silence, except for our galloping hoofs; but a moment or two later we heard the Indians riding after us. They had not taken long to mount.

"We have got through," said Reece, speaking in his natural voice, "Shiloh's not touched: is Blue Dick?"

"Not touched," I shouted.

"Then," he said as if relieved, "I think we'll give them a long ride."

"Will they follow us?" I asked.

"Sure, sure," he said, "they'll try, but if in the next five hours we get twenty-five miles ahead it's probable they won't hang on but will try to stampede the camp or to raise hell before we come back."

We scarcely spoke again for the next hour: the horses were going in a long stretching gallop and I felt certain we were leaving the Indians more than five miles in each hour.

We had been galloping for about an hour when it first came to me that Blue Dick was not going as strongly as usual. At the end of an hour's gallop, as a rule, she would almost pull one out of the saddle; she wanted to get her head free; one felt huge strength in her muscles of steel: now she kept up with Shiloh; and that was all.

I could not make it out. I shook her together, and she answered at once; but almost immediately the effort died out, and she went on again in the same heavy way.

"Are you going your fastest?" I asked Reece.

"Oh, no," he said, "about three-quarter pace, I should think."

"There's something the matter with Blue Dick," I said, my heart aching, "or she'd be wanting to leave you now."

"Really?" cried Reece. "I'll loose Shiloh out and see."

The next moment Shiloh had left us: fear came to me for the first time.

"Reece," I called; "Reece!"

A moment afterwards he had drawn up, and I was beside him again.

"There's something the matter with Blue Dick," I cried, "she can't gallop as she did: you couldn't leave her like that. Oh, my poor horse! I'm sure she's been hit."

"You mustn't mind," said Reece. "She must be ridden right out."

"Can't I get off and look?" I asked.

"No, no," he said. "The Indians are close behind. Every inch tells if Shiloh has to carry double. If you are sure I'd better get rid of my saddle."

"No," I said, "your saddle's light too, and I shall be able to run holding on to the stirrup-leather."

It was a thing Reece and I had practiced again and again. I had read somewhere in one of Napoleon's campaigns, I think, of a regiment of horses bringing a regiment of infantry quickly over eight or ten miles, the infantry holding on to the stirrup leathers and going with the horses in a canter. I had tried it often enough

with Reece, and with Bob, so that I could keep up with a good horse cantering for many a mile. With the main part of one's weight on one's arm, you only need to touch the ground with your toes to keep up. It is most exhilarating exercise, almost like flying, and I had practiced it a good deal. I was quite willing to try it now, much more willing indeed to try it than to ride my poor wounded horse; but Reece would not hear of it.

"You'll have enough of running," he said; "Blue Dick must carry you every foot she can."

So I tried to think of something else, and rode on. Before I had detected the weakness in Blue Dick we had already lost the sound of the Indians altogether; but of course we knew that they were following. Strange to say, though Blue Dick showed weakness to me who knew her courage and strength the pace did not alter for some time; but gradually it grew slower. An hour or so later Reece said:

"She is not going now much faster than the Indian ponies; but keep on; every mile counts."

"But they won't follow us," I said, "when we are out of sight, will they?"

"If they see Blue Dick's bad," he said, "they'll follow us till they catch us."

"How many of them do you think are after us, now?" I asked.

"Twenty or thirty," was the answer.

"But you could keep them off with a rifle?"

"For a few hours," he replied, "yes; but not for long." I began to see clearly that the danger was much greater than I had imagined. Suddenly it seemed certain to me that I should be killed; the Indians must catch us: but I

could not realize it. I shook my head: no, no; somehow or other I'd get out; I didn't know how; but a way there must be. Meanwhile my heart was aching for Blue Dick; I could not bear to press her, the great heart who galloped on, in spite of everything, in spite of the pain, in spite of the sickness: the deathless courage of the horse brought tears to my eyes. It was horrible, sitting on her back, knowing that she was in agony. But I had already found out that in this life the weaker must often pay the debt of the stronger, even in death; yet it seemed dreadful to accept the sacrifice, dreadful. At the end of the next hour Blue Dick was certainly not going fast: she would make an effort for two or three hundred yards; it would die gradually away to a slow canter; then another effort.

"Oh, Reece," I cried, "let me leave her. I can't bear to sit on her back: I can't stand it. I would rather run till I dropped."

"No, no," said Reece, "you must ride her right out, for both our sakes. The Indians may stop. She has probably been bleeding internally; if they see no blood on the ground, they may stop before she fails. I am getting more hopeful now she has gone so long. I think we should turn to the right sharp for perhaps another hour."

As he spoke he acted, and we turned almost at right angles. It is too painful even to recall that next hour's ride: Blue Dick labored on as well as she could; even after the canter was impossible she trotted on for some time resolutely, as if she knew the dire necessity as well as we did; but at last even her strength was worn out: the trot came to be a walk, and I threw myself from her back.

"I can't stand it," I said, lifting the pad from her back: "I can go faster alone."

"Well," said Reece, "let's get on. You'd better get up behind me."

"No, no!" I replied, "I'll run with the stirrup leather."

"Come then," he cried, "come; we mustn't lose a moment," but I could not leave Blue Dick: there she stood, the great horse, with her head carried low. I put my hand all over her, and away down, down her barrel, my hand got wet: that is where she had been shot: I felt the sticky blood, but Reece was imperative.

"Don't play the fool; come on!"

I kissed Blue Dick's velvet-soft muzzle with tears scalding my cheeks, and took hold of Reece's stirrup leather and the next moment Shiloh was in the old long canter.

"You'd really better get up, you know," said Reece, "because I want to go as fast as I can for the next two hours till day-break."

"Go as fast as you like," I said, "I can keep up."

Gradually he urged the horse and Shiloh's stride grew longer and the neck stretched out further and further. I suppose we had gone nearly an hour before I began to feel tired and then, just when I had about enough Reece began to draw Shiloh in.

"I think we'll be clean out of sight of them," he said; "but I wish we could get on to that wave prairie, and away from this beastly flat plain."

Strange to say, in another quarter of an hour we began to go up a hill, and then down a hill: just at day-break we had come to a place where the prairie did lie in waves.

"Have you your glasses?" said Reece, as we mounted a big ridge.

"Yes," I answered.

When we got well on top of the ridge he pulled up, and glad I was of the rest: I felt as if my heart would burst, so out of breath, exhausted I was, and trembling from head to foot.

"Give me your glasses," he said. "Lead Shiloh down the hill a little, out of sight, and then we'll see if they are still following." The day was just breaking, and when I had led Shiloh fifty yards down the slope and picketed him, out of sight, I turned back to Reece.

"Lie down, lie down," he said as I came near him, and I crawled the last ten yards to the top of the slope on my hands and knees. Slowly as the day dawned Reece swept every inch of the horizon.

"Can you see Blue Dick?" I asked.

"No," he said; "nor any trace of an Indian on his horse—thank goodness!"

"How far can you see?" I asked.

"Fully twenty miles," he replied. "I think they have given up. Let's have some food: be careful how you go. Loose Shiloh's girths, and when you go back rub him down: we will give him some water at the next creek. Then you go to sleep till I wake you. In a couple of hours we must see them if they are following, and the rest will do both Shiloh and you good. You look as if you needed it," he added, smiling.

"Oh, I'm all right now, a bit pumped, that's all."

"You ought to have slept yesterday afternoon, and you'd have been stronger."

"I'm strong enough."

"Go down and sleep now," he said, "after you bring the meat."

As soon as we had eaten something I lay down on the slope of the hill with Shiloh's saddle under my head, and was fast asleep in a moment, with my face just turned away from the sun, and the broad hat over me like an umbrella. I seemed to have slept but a moment when Reece woke me; but I must have been sleeping for at least three hours: the sun was very warm.

"Will you watch now for a couple of hours?" he said, "and let me sleep. If you see nothing by midday we can both sleep till the cool of the evening. I'm going to travel by night."

"You've seen nothing then?" I cried.

"I've seen no sign of man or beast," he answered, "and I've been watching nearly three hours."

"Three hours!" I repeated in astonishment. "Have I been sleeping three hours?"

"I guess so," he said, laughing, "now I'll try"; and he stretched himself out where I had been lying, with his head on the saddle, and I took the glasses and went up to the top of the slope.

I went all over the sky-line, first of all, most carefully: there was not a trace of anything to be seen, then I covered all the nearer distances—still nothing.

Very soon, lying there in the hot sun, I began to be sleepy; but I stuck to the job, rolled over sharply now and then, to keep myself awake, and used the glasses again and again. The sun climbed higher and higher in the heavens; the heat became greater and greater: I was fairly baked with it; but I kept my watch for the two hours and then as there was no sign of anything I turned

and went down the hill, stretched myself out beside Reece, and in a moment was fast asleep.

There is nothing new under the sun, they say, and so I suppose others have enjoyed the experience of trying to cover more than three hundred miles in five nights when there was only one horse for two persons; but the experiment is not agreeable, to say the best of it.

It was the cooler air of the evening which woke us; we had lain on the shadowy side of the slope, and as the sun went down, it began to get chilly. As soon as we were on our feet Reece made his way to the top of the slope and searched the back track for Indians, while I rubbed Shiloh down. In five minutes Reece was with me again.

"Nothing in sight," he said, "not a living thing, thank God. Now there will be five miles of walking to begin with; thirty miles of trot and canter, and twenty miles more walking; we ought to do fifty or sixty miles a night —I wish Shiloh were seven years old instead of ten."

We ate a strip or two of jerked beef and started. The first couple of hours walking seemed to do us all good; it certainly loosened my joints and took away the feeling of fatigue; it limbered Shiloh up, too, for at the end of it he was quite ready to trot, and trot he did, while I hung on to the stirrup leather and kept up as best as I could. After an hour or two of that work I needed no disciple of Kant to teach me the relativity of time: seconds became minutes, minutes lengthened themselves into hours, hours were interminable spaces marked off one from the other by an arm getting numb and forcing me to run round the horse to take up the other stirrup leather, and so continue without losing a moment. At intervals of a couple of hours we came across a creek

which had to be waded, and which gave me momentary rest and a break in the monotony of effort. After midnight these things all passed as in a dream. I can remember seconds when at the top of some ridge I was acutely conscious of a cool breeze and star-sewn skies and the vague outline of prairie ridges; but soon I was again merged in the jog, jog, jog, jog.

Towards morning the weak spot in my harness began to declare itself; my feet began to pain me. Of course, it was natural enough: I had been riding for months and months. No one in that country ever walked even a hundred yards unless by dire necessity. I have seen men swing themselves on to their horses to go fifty yards across a street. My feet had got soft, and I began to look forward, foolishly enough, to the next creek in which to cool them.

Towards daybreak the pain became very sharp; but when the sun rose I was astounded to find Reece looked more tired than I felt: his face was drawn, and I remembered he had not spoken to me for some time.

"What is it, Reece?" I asked. "You don't look well."

"I suppose it's partly hunger," he answered, "I am fagged out. What have we done since the start? A hundred and fifty miles, I suppose. We'll stop at the next creek and get a rest in the shade."

The next creek came, and here and there on its banks, a few scrub cotton-wood trees. We took off the horse's saddle and rubbed him over, picketed him with as long a tether as possible, and then threw ourselves down to rest in the shadow of the nearest tree. I was peacefully asleep as soon as I touched the ground and I slept till

high noon. Reece was sitting up, looking at me, when I woke.

"Are you better?" I asked.

"I have just awakened, too," he replied. "I feel much better, but horribly hungry. This biltong is no good at all. How much have you got?"

I showed him my piece, about three pounds.

"Mine isn't half as big," he remarked, ruefully, "but then, I have eaten some of it."

"We must divide it between us," I said. "I had some of yours last night."

"That's all right," he replied; "but unless we kill something we'll hardly last three nights more at this game."

I got up as Reece spoke, and suddenly realized from the soreness of my feet that I should have difficulty in going.

The worst of it was my boots were wearing out: at each toe the sole was parting company with the upper. The running and the wettings had played the devil with my footgear. I took the boots off, and looked at them sorrowfully.

"They'll not last out," I said to Reece.

He shook his head. "I wonder whether it will be better to tire Shiloh trying to get food? Let's look at him."

The old horse was a little tucked up: his joints had filled a little; but otherwise his eye was bright, his skin bright and healthy and his feet fairly cool. He had stood the two nights very well, and would perhaps stand two or three more without coming to grief. We picketed him in a new place, and turned to consider our own position with a little more hope.

But first of all as a stimulus to thought we ate a pound or so of biltong, washed down with water from the creek, and then debated the serious question whether we should decide to rest the whole day and go only in the cool night. We decided to go on about five o'clock, and give ourselves, at any rate, the chance of game. Discomfort loomed large now that danger seemed to have disappeared. In the meantime Reece declared that he would go along the creek with a rifle for three or four miles, and take the chance of getting a shot. He said he would start about three, and be back before five. I spent the couple of hours cutting my handkerchief into strips with which to tie up my boots. The more I considered my blistered feet the more I dreaded another ten hours of walking and trotting.

When I had finished with my boots, I lay down with the saddle under my head, and was soon fast asleep. . . .

I started upright; what was it? I had heard something; Shiloh's head, too, was in the air. What could it be? Though we were on the creek bottom, the prairie was so flat I could see over it for miles, but I could discover nothing. I walked across to the cotton-wood tree, and in a few moments had swung myself to the top of it. I looked everywhere, nothing to be seen, nothing. I came down again, somewhat reassured, thinking it must be nearly time for Reece to return. When I looked at my watch I found it was quarter past four. I spent the time at my disposal in rubbing a little piece of bacon-fat over my feet. I was thus engaged when, of a sudden, Reece hailed me:

"Didn't you hear me shoot?"

"No," I replied, "but it must have been your shot that woke me. What did you get?"

"Three prairie chickens," he said, showing the birds.

"Three," I cried, feeling the water come into my mouth, "three! Good man!"

It did not take us long to pluck them and clean them, and it didn't take us long either, to light a fire and cook them, and it took us still shorter time to eat them. If you think of it, we had been forty odd hours on a piece of biltong, and had run and walked a hundred and fifty odd miles in those forty-five hours. I never knew that prairie chicken could be so luscious: I never knew that they were such tiny birds before. I ate mine in about two minutes, and there was not a piece of skin on a bone of him. We had resolved to keep the third for the next day. If there had been two more of them I know we should have eaten them there and then; but one was really too little to break our resolve for. I looked at it, and Reece looked at it, and when we caught ourselves, we burst out laughing.

"It would be senseless," I cried. "We must keep it for to-morrow's breakfast. You will need it if I don't."

This meal took from us the necessity of going out after game, so, for Shiloh's sake, we waited till the sun had sunk to the horizon's edge before we started. Even then the pace was very different from that of the preceding night, in spite of all our efforts Shiloh was very stiff. Instead of walking about four and a half miles an hour he walked about three and a half; and my feet were terribly sore, and grew worse all the while. At the end of two or three hours Reece shook Shiloh into a trot;

but it was a poor sort of a trot, and after half an hour of it the old horse got back to his walking again.

That night was no dream to me: the pain in my feet kept me wide awake, and before midnight I became aware that my soles were parting company from the uppers, and that I must tie them together again. I had nothing but either my flannel shirt or my buckskin jacket. I took the tail of the buckskin jacket, cut it into strips, and tied my soles on with these thongs; but they had to be tied tight to hold, and this increased the discomfort. That night was one of the most miserable I have ever passed: I was strong and well, the prairie chicken had revived me; but my feet gave me indescribable torture. We had overdone it the first two nights; the third night we hardly made more than thirty-five miles.

As it began to grow light, Reece, seeing me limping proposed, as he often had before, that I should get up behind him and ride; but I could not put the horse to the burden of it, so I limped along as well as I could. Reece was twice my years when we started out but from eighteen I had aged forty years, it seemed to me, in the last three days.

Just before sunrise we came to a creek. A little breeze had just got up, the skies in the east were changing from gray to the shimmering beauty of mother-of-pearl. The scene was fairy-like in beauty. On both sides of the creek the prairie was carpeted with masses of purple and white convolvulus, which the frontier people, with a tinge of poetry call, "purple morning glory." But I had weak eyes for the beauty of flowers.

I let Reece unsaddle Shiloh and rub him down, while

I made my way to the creek and bathed my wounded feet. The whisky came in handy: I found that it dried up the cuts and blisters in a most astonishing way, and after devouring the prairie chicken half raw, and very much burnt, we were soon sound asleep in the shade.

That third morning we touched the nadir of discomfort and pain. After a long rest in the heat, Reece went out with a rifle and got a jack rabbit and a small turkey, which put us beyond fear of hunger. By eight or nine o'clock, when we started, my feet had got much better, and curiously enough, Shiloh was not as stiff as he had been on the previous night. We all seemed to have got our second wind.

The only thing very memorable about the rest of the journey is that we saw absolutely no more game, and after the next morning's breakfast on the remains of the turkey, we had nothing but biltong till we reached the Fort.

We saw the Fort in the gray before the dawning, and we were seen from it almost as soon. We were received with the cordiality which American soldiers generally show to the unfortunate, and the captain who was told off for the rescue was eager to start then and there; but Reece and I protested; we wanted one square meal, and would saddle up as soon after noon as he pleased.

About four o'clock in the afternoon we started on the back trail, accompanied by sixty troopers of the 3rd U.S. Cavalry; they all went light, four of the scouts with them leading horses. They were all picked men; but they took eight days to do what we had done in five nights, and even then their horses were a sight. Each trooper carried about twenty or thirty pounds more weight than

he had any need to carry, and twenty or thirty pounds on a horse's back makes a difference when he is ridden all out.

On the seventh night we came within some forty miles of the camp, and the two scouts, Reece and myself went ahead on the led horses; but the Indians had evidently got wind of our coming, for there was no trace of them to be seen, though the places where their camp fires had been were still warm.

We heard the whole story of the fortnight's blockade the next morning in camp. It was a fortnight filled with exciting incidents; a fortnight in which Bent saved the situation, once by his foresight and Wild Bill several times by his wonderful shooting. Perhaps I shall tell the story of it some day.

A couple of hours behind us the United States troops came in. We killed a fat young cow, broached the last cask of whisky, and feasted them of our best. Our stories were better than our fare. They stayed with us that night, saw us next morning drive the cattle out on the trail, accompanied us, indeed, for some eight or ten miles, and then took a cheery leave. They were as good soldiers, I think, as are to be found in the world, and of a better class than the common soldiers in most armies; their only disappointment had been that the Indians had not waited and given them a chance of trying their rifles.

CHAPTER XIV

SHIPPING CATTLE BY TRAIN

As we slowly crawled past the Indian territory and came into South-West-Kansas, we were astonished at the progress which even five or six months had made in the settlement of the country. When we went down in the Spring there was no farm within fifty miles of the trail; now we found that the farms had crept up to within twenty or thirty miles of the trail. What was still more interesting to us, some of these farms had taken in and reclaimed "desert land," as it was called—land, that is, sparsely covered with the thick harsh buffalo grass. The farmers found that when this land was broken up it bore abundant crops, and, though it took eight and ten yoke of oxen to break it, for the matted roots of the buffalo grass went down eighteen inches or two feet, still, the cost was soon covered by the enormous crops which this virgin soil yielded.

Hardly a day passed now but some farmer came on the trail to pick up some cows cheap, or half a dozen calves, and this went on for the next twenty or thirty

days. Such visitors grew more and more frequent as we drew northward to Fort Leavenworth, where we intended, if prices ruled high in St. Louis or Chicago, to put our cattle on the train and ship them through. On the road between Wichita and Leavenworth we sold nearly a thousand of the worst of our cattle—that is, the worst from the point of view of beef, young cows and calves chiefly—and this thousand head more than paid us for the money we had spent on the five thousand and the wages of the men going down and coming up again. The profits on one herd successfully brought through was from five to six fold—a sufficient proof of the difficulties and dangers of the long trail.

Even in those days Fort Leavenworth was a town of some importance; on the direct line of the Kansas Pacific Railway, it was the chief place between Kansas City and Denver. It lay just on the edge of the great plains, and the trail ran within a day's journey of it to the westward. Here settled farms and civilization had pushed their way, right out on the trail itself, and it was through snake fences that we drove the herd from the trail to the town.

Fortunately for us, prices ruled high in Chicago, so we soon hired six full trains of thirty trucks apiece, and prepared to ship our cattle to the great market. Of course, we had a farewell dinner and drink; but I could not help noticing that merely coming to civilization again seemed to loosen the ties of association and companionship which had held our men together for months past.

The moment we were all paid Wild Bill drifted off to a gambling saloon, and was seen no more; he was pretty sure not to stir from the faro table till he had won thou-

sands or lost the three or four hundred dollars that his summer's work had brought him.

Charlie and Bent and Paul, Reece and myself and Bob, stuck together, intending to spend the winter on the ranch, and to go down on the trail again in the following spring; but the other five melted away imperceptibly; indeed, only one of them turned up at the dinner.

The dinner—to me, at least—was a lugubrious affair; it was pleasant sitting down to a white table-cloth and an ordered meal once more, but there was a constraint over the whole thing. Charlie threw his hat on the floor, and a waiter had to pick it up and put it on the rack. He insisted on having his revolvers beside him on the table, and altogether for the first two or three days we were not at our ease.

We had to wait for nearly a week for the hundred and eighty cattle cars, and after that we had a desperate hard and long day's work getting all the Texan cattle on board. One man had to go with each train of the six trains. I intended to go with Reece, but I soon found that he wished me to go with Bob. Bob was not quite trustworthy where money was concerned; he had once, it appeared, sold a whole train-load of cattle and disappeared for three months, to present himself near Christmas at the ranch and ask to be taken on again, after having "blowed" every farthing of the money for which he had sold the cattle. He was so valuable a man that the theft was overlooked; but no one wanted it to occur again, so I was deputed to go with Bob and look out that he played square. The trainload of cattle was invoiced in my name, and did indeed belong to me.

It was a good thing for me that I was deputed to go with Bob; but when I first heard the proposal I opposed it with all my might, for I knew, though the others didn't, that Reece's companionship in a town was extremely agreeable. He gravitated naturally to the best hotel; naturally, too, turned out with dress clothes in the evening, and went to some reasonable place of amusement instead of simply passing from drinking saloon to drinking saloon in a stupid endeavor to wreck the splendid health and strength which six months of outdoor life on the trail had given him. I was always learning something from Reece; besides, I admired and liked him, and I did not want to be shut up with Bob and two common brakemen for eight or ten days in a filthy caboose where there was nothing to do except play cards and listen to foul talk and drink foul whisky. But Reece told me we would make up for it by having a good time in Chicago, and assured me besides that we should have a break at Kansas City and spend the evening together, and so I consented to guard my cattle and keep an eye on Bob.

I suppose I pulled a long face when it was all settled, for with his usual kindness Reece took me on one side:

"Don't look so down in the mouth," he said. "You can learn things from Bob that none of us can teach you."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"There's a lot to learn on the train," he said. "The cattle are packed tight in the cars to keep on their feet; if they had much room they would be thrown down in the jolting, for the way is badly ironed. Even as it is, some day or other, or probably some night, a steer will go down and kick two or three others in his efforts to

get up. We can only jab them with a goad, and so try to make them get on their feet again; sometimes we do not succeed, and I have known a dozen cattle to be taken out dead in a single car after one bad night. But Bob can go into the car day or night and get the cattle up. If you keep him sober, or comparatively sober, you should not lose many beasts between here and Chicago, and we shall certainly lose an average of two or three out of each car, though we may lose none in the first days while the cattle are strong."

The novel prospect somewhat reconciled me to going with Bob. We started from Leavenworth one evening about seven o'clock towards the end of August. The day had been insufferably hot, a hundred degrees in the shade and a hundred and sixty and seventy in the sun. The worst of it was that the cattle had been packed in the infernal wagons the whole day long, waiting to be drawn out. This very first day I found an unexpected and unwelcome trait in Bob's character. He would not help me to water the cattle at all.

"Damn them!" he said, "let 'em hang their tongues out. I'm goin' to play cards in the caboose."

He believed he could win all the brakemen's money, and I could not get the little brute away from the painted pasteboards, so I spent the greater part of the day running backwards and forwards watering the cattle, and it is no joke trying to water five hundred cattle, particularly through the bars of the trucks. I was wet through twenty times and twenty times dried again in the sun. But when we started out in the cool of the evening, as the first train, I was delighted to be complimented by Reece on having been able to water the cattle,

for my trainload was the only trainload which had been properly fed and watered—and perhaps that was the reason I had no mishap the first night.

About two hours after we started we got to Topeka, the capital of the State, and I nipped down out of the caboose at once, and went along the train, delighted to find my cattle all in good case, not one of them having fallen.

We started again, but when we ran into Lawrence, the town made memorable by Quantrill's devilish raid just before the Civil war, I found that a steer had got down in the third car. It must have fallen through the jolting when entering the station. I tried to use the goad and get it up, but when it kicked down the steer beside it, and that steer began to kick, I rushed back to the caboose for Bob.

At first Bob would not stir, but I soon convinced him that it was better to come by kicking over his cards and lugging him outside. He put his hand on his knife on the way, but as soon as he was outside he grinned at me, and turned again into the little good-tempered, conceited and efficient man whom I had learnt to like in the months on the trail.

As soon as we got outside Bob asked:

"Which car?" and then, "How many cattle are down?"

"The third car," I replied; and "three, I think," as we ran along the metal line together. When he got to the car it was already dark, but by the bull's-eye lantern which I carried I could just show Bob that several of the cattle were down, four or five, as well as I could see.

"Bad luck," said Bob, as we swung ourselves up on

to the planking and held on by one of the bars of the wagon.

"He have kicked the master down. Don't touch that one!" he cried; "he no good. Here's the one," and he pointed through the bars to the third one. They had already kicked themselves quiet; but as soon as Bob struck the third one on the ribs and on the head, he made a frantic effort to get up; but slipped down again in the wet and filth. "I go in," said Bob. "How?" I asked. "Crawl through the bars," he said, pointing to the higher horizontal bars.

"You'll be kicked to death," I cried.

" 'Merican man kicked: me no kicked," he answered contemptuously.

The next moment he had climbed up to the large open space just above the heads of the cattle, squeezed himself through, and dropped down beside the master steer. The danger was appalling; it was as if he had gone into the very blackness of Death: the light from the little lantern I carried broke and flittered, affording rare glimpses of what was going on, and if I held it steady the shaft of light it threw was too thin and slight to give much help. I felt rather than saw that Bob kicked the steer cruelly to make it get up; twice it tried to rise, twice it floundered down again; but in none of its plunges did it touch Bob, and the third time it stood upon its legs trembling with the effort and the fear. In two minutes more the others had got up of their own accord, and Bob had squeezed himself through the bars again, and was hanging on beside me.

"Bad to happen first night," was his remark. "Damn bad road. Lose a lot, we shall."

"I don't want to lose any," I said. "How shall I prevent it?"

"Feed 'em again," he said, "and give 'em some more water; make 'em strong"; and back he went to the caboose and his game of faro.

Nothing more was to be done with Bob, and so I set to work to carry out his instructions, and then returned to the caboose myself.

Bob grinned at me as I entered. "You likey work?"

"No," I said, "I don't; but I don't want to lose my cattle."

"Then why not go along the train all night?" he said, "till we get to Kansas City?"

I would not leave any effort untried, so I spent the next three hours before we got to Kansas City swinging along the narrow step, while holding on by the rough bars of the cattle wagons. Out there in the wind hanging on to the narrow step, and swinging from car to car, one realized how vilely the road was laid; the joints were sometimes nine inches apart, and the train jolted fearfully. But the cattle held each other up, for as soon as any one showed signs of weakness I was hard at work with the goad, and we had no further mishap till Kansas City. We got there at three o'clock in the morning, and I was surprised to find that I was tired. Watering cattle all day in the sun, and swinging backwards and forwards all night on the outside of a train, had made me tired and sleepy, and when we were shunted on to a siding in Kansas City I went back to the caboose, where Bob and the two brakemen had been smoking for the last six hours in a fog thick enough to be cut with a knife, and there in

a corner I curled myself up on a buffalo rug and slept as only healthy youth sleeps.

I had only been sleeping for a minute, it seemed, when I was awakened by Reece bending over me.

"I thought you'd like to get up," he said, "and see Kansas City."

"What time is it?" I asked, though before he answered I knew by the heat that I had overslept myself.

"It's nearly eight o'clock," he said; "we have just run in; I want to go to the hotel and get a bath and a change."

"I should like a bath, too," I confessed, ruefully; "but I think I had better water the cattle."

"Oh," he said, negligently, "let Bob do that."

"It's all very fine to talk," I answered, "but Bob won't do it."

"It's easy enough to get some one about these yards to do it," he remarked.

It was curious that the moment we got to civilization Reece became an idler again, and insisted on employing others to do everything for him. I said nothing while he called a brakeman, put a dollar bill in his hand, and told him he'd earn another if he got some cattlemen to water our cattle and feed them. The brakeman promised to see to it, and Reece took me away at once to the hotel. Before I left I found out that the next start would be at eleven o'clock that night, and I told Bob that if he got drunk I'd leave him behind, and Reece told him he'd have him locked up, and with these admonitions we went our way.

Reece had a bath and a shave, while I had a good swim and rub down, and we met an hour later for breakfast. And what a breakfast we had! Reece ordered, and

I contented myself with practical approval. We began, I remember, with a canteloupe melon; an omelette *aux rognons* followed, all golden brown; and then a steak; a few reed birds came next, and the American reed-bird is better eating than the ortolan; and with the reed birds a fine bottle of claret, and then peaches and cheese—a substantial breakfast, if you will, but full of delight to one who had only eaten half-cooked buffalo meat for months. At that moment it seemed as if it would stick to my ribs for life!

During breakfast I told Reece all that had passed in the night, and how determined I was to find out how Bob knew the master animal in every half-dozen, just as I had found out how he knew the master bull in a herd. Reece wouldn't interest himself in the matter.

"Bob's a *gaucho*," he said, "and the grandson of *gauchos*, men who have lived with cattle and done nothing else, from father to son, for perhaps two hundred years; they know things that we cannot learn."

But I was not to be put off; I was determined to learn. The only time Reece showed any interest was when I told him how Bob had got into the cattle truck.

"There is a thing," he said, "that not one man in a million would dare to think of. Fancy being kicked down at night among cattle mad with fear, kicked to death by brutes! Horrible, horrible! I would not do that for all the money in America."

In some curious way this made me resolve to do it, as soon as the need should come.

When Reece came to the dinner dressed in evening clothes I was very much surprised.

"Where did you get them?" I asked, thinking at the

time how infinitely better he looked than any of the overdressed, yet half-dressed people about us in the hotel dining-room, for in those days most Westerners thought a black broadcloth frock-coat, with a black tie, the height of fashion; and Reece in dress clothes, which fitted him perfectly, made them all look common and underbred. I had only a short dark coat and dark trousers; but I was very proud of being with Reece, partly out of the snobbishness every one learns in English schools, partly because he drank champagne, to the horror of every one, while all the other diners were content with water, or, at the worst, whisky-and-water. But when the time came to get back to the yard and to the trains a certain selfishness showed itself in Reece.

"I don't start till a couple of hours after you," he remarked, lighting a cigar; "I am not going to hurry."

So I left him with his coffee and liqueur and hurried back to the cattle yards. There I changed into my rough clothes in five minutes, and went in search of Bob. I found him dead drunk in a corner of the yard. I picked him up and carried him to the water-tank, and turned the hose on him, and in two minutes had him sober, if wet and cross. He would not hear of going into the caboose and changing; he simply shook himself and took another drink out of a bottle he carried with him. I managed to get the bottle away from him and hid it in the caboose and in ten minutes we were on the swaying, groaning, rattling train again, and drawing out northwards.

The first night from Kansas City passed almost without event. We ran the whole night through, and only stopped at a wayside station in the morning, about four

o'clock, to let a passenger train go ahead while we watered and fed our stock. Bob had slept the whole night through, so he seemed willing to share this duty with me; and when we started again, after a couple of hours' work, I had the satisfaction of knowing that the cattle were all well cared for. I was able to sleep, and did sleep till hunger woke me about one o'clock, when I got some food in the caboose.

The second night we had a worse experience. The cattle were getting tired with having stood so long, and about midnight I found three or four down in the second car. I went back to Bob and woke him; but he swore he was not going to work all day and all night too, and I might get the damn cattle myself. I offered him a couple of dollars to come and do it, and when he refused I put the price up to five dollars; I could not bear to think of the cattle kicking each other to pieces in the car.

"Five dollars," I said, "if you will come; and if you don't by God! you shan't sleep. I'll keep you awake, if I can do nothing else."

The silver arguments at last conquered Bob, and he came out.

By the time we had swung ourselves abreast the second car it was a sort of pandemonium. The train was swaying and jolting and creaking; the cattle now lowing, now bellowing with rage and fear, and to my horror at least a dozen of them were down. Think of it! The night was pitch dark, and we had only a bull's-eye lantern to show inside the car an uncertain, heaving sea of plunging, kicking brutes. Almost at once Bob stopped.

"That's the one," he said, pointing to a steer with a

white blaze on its face. But nothing we could do at first would make the steer get to his feet.

"Damn brute," said Bob. "Tired, too."

"Go inside, Bob," I said, "make him get up."

"Damn fine," said Bob; "give me five dollars more, and I go."

"All right," I said, too sick at heart to bargain.

"Pay now," said Bob. "Pay now."

"I can't pay now," I retorted, angrily; "I'll pay in the morning. Go on."

The next moment the little devil had climbed up and was lowering himself down into the car. I kept the bull's-eye on him and on the steer with the white blaze. He did nothing, and it immediately made frantic effort to rise, which Bob aided by catching hold of its near horn and pulling on it. The little extra purchase helped the steer to its feet. A minute afterwards Bob had climbed out the car again, and before he was outside the car a couple of others had risen, and a little application of the goad got them all up. The thing seemed simple enough when Bob did it; but he was the only man among all the thousands of Western cattlemen who would dare the feat, even in daylight.

We ought to have stopped on the second morning; but I was told there were so many cattle trains behind us that we had better go through, at any rate for another day and night, and unluckily for me I consented, and after watering the cattle in the morning we started out. Ten hours later we watered and fed them again, and then began the night journey, the worst I have ever experienced. It was like a night in the Inferno. Just before dark it came on to rain, one of those late summer rains

which are as heavy as tropical showers in the middle Atlantic states; but in spite of the rain I went out and kept my watch on the knifeboard outside the cars, back and forth, back and forth, without haste or rest. Passing a little roadside station I found that two of the cattle were down in the first car, and all my efforts to get them up were unavailing. The rain had poured into the cars and made everything wet and slippery; the knifeboard, too, was slippery, and it was hard to swing oneself along in face of the rain that fell in sheets and lashed one as if shot from a hose-pipe.

I made my way back to the caboose and told Bob; but Bob was sleepy and cross, and refused to stir. Again and again I begged him; then I tried to bribe him; but he had not been able to get drink and was nasty tempered.

"Go and get 'em up yourself," he said. "You 'Merican, you do it. Damn fine man, 'Merican—damn ass! You do it! You leave Bob alone! Bob want sleep!"

And when I tried to rouse him, he drew his knife and I knew from the vicious ugly face that there would be a bitter row if I pressed him any further, so I got out and made my way along the knifeboard to car number one and found to my horror that five or six of the animals were down. I peered through the bars at the first steer; his eyes were wild with fear: again and again he made frantic efforts to get up and again and again fell on the slippery dirty floor. I went to the next, seeking for the master steer; but for the life of me I could not see any difference between them. I stuck at it, putting my head down to my knees, and by the light of the lantern examining them one after the other. I was determined to

find out without Bob if I could, knowing that it was partly a consciousness of his unique value which made him so brutally perverse.

I went over the five or six cattle three or four times pātiently, with the rain pouring down the back of my neck, and slopping out of my big raw-hide boots. Which was the leader? The red head, the one with the star on her forehead, the brown, the one with the blaze, the black, the one with the long white horns?—back and forth I peered, but I could find out nothing. Was I more stupid than Bob? Already I had learned to watch for and note slight indications; but at first I could see none. Then a thought came to me and I poked the cattle with the goad, one after the other, and while doing this the key to the puzzle showed itself: in their extremity the animals revealed their natures.

As each of them tried to rise to the goad I suddenly noticed that when the steer with the black head tried to get up and failed the one next him tried immediately to get up; but the black steer paid no attention to any of the others. The black steer was the leader. But how did Bob know at once? Infinitely slight indications spoke to him which passed unperceived by me; but I was on the right way, and that was something. The black steer had got his head entangled in his halter so that it hindered him from getting up. I knew that Bob would have got inside the truck and freed the horn; but I confess that I had not pluck enough to do that. I goaded the black steer until he made another frantic effort to get up, and while doing it with neck outstretched he got his horn so that I could slip the halter over the end of it, which I did; but as he lurched forward, before going down again,

his horn caught my arm, and tore it almost as a knife would have done, in a long, jagged cut. I goaded him again, and got him to his feet, and in two or three minutes the rest followed suit.

In spite of the smarting of my cut arm, I went back to the caboose very proud of myself. I told Bob I had found the master-steer, too, and got them all up; but he only glared at me!

" 'Merican man damn fool. Leave me sleep, won't you? Bob want sleep."

And he curled himself up again, and went to sleep, while in the shifting light of the oil lamp the brakeman bound up my arm in a clean handkerchief. I had half learned my lesson. I was soon forced to learn the rest.

It was partly out of bravado, partly because I was resolved not to lose a single beast if work and watchfulness would bring them safe through that I went out again along the cars in spite of my wounded and painful arm.

Fortunately nothing of any difficulty occurred that night. Now and then a beast got down; but he was easily persuaded by the goad to get up again. Somewhere about two o'clock in the morning, long before daybreak, the jolting train came to a stop, and we were shoved off on a siding and told that we should have to stay there at least one day. The day became two; but I was glad of the rest. My arm healed at the first intention, and after one long night's sleep I was as well as ever and full of beans. I was eager, indeed, to meet the next emergency and enter the car as Bob did. I told myself that the chance might come to me first in daylight, and if it did, I would take it.

We jolted out from the siding about eight o'clock in

the morning, and took up the next two days' journey to Chicago, and that day, perhaps owing to the successful feeding and watering, no beast went down; but we only stopped an hour in the evening, through some mistake, and were only able to water the cattle and feed them in the most perfunctory manner. I anticipated trouble, and I was not disappointed.

Even before it got very dark I had all my work cut out to get one car straight, and just about midnight when I reached the first car, the nearest to the engine, I found that half the beasts were down. A little study gave me the leader, but I could not get the brown beast even to try to get up though there was nothing to hinder him, and the others were kicking and floundering about in a terrible taking. I had my lantern on my left arm.

Clearly the moment had come. Should I go in by myself, or should I go back for Bob? I could not go back. The little beggar had got wet through in the hurried watering which had put him in a bad temper: I did not care to beg him; besides it had to be done sooner or later, I said to myself: why not try it now? One moment I hesitated, thinking I would go and bring Bob so that if anything happened he might help me; but that seemed unworthy. After all, in these days each herring has to hang by its own head; I would not ask for help. The next moment I had climbed the bars and slipped over the top one and was going gingerly enough between the legs of the brown one, which rolled wild eyes at me. The standing ground was worse than I had imagined; it was slippery with wet and filth; but it was too late to draw back.

"Come on," I shouted, in the gruffest, sharpest tone, half to reassure myself and using my foot to liven him

up. At once the beast made a frantic effort to rise and came down again. As he came down his sprawling hind leg knocked my feet from under me, and I came down with a plump on his body. That started him and saved me, for the next moment he made a huge effort to get up, which swung me off him on to my feet again, and this time he stood up.

Hardly was he up when the one on my left tried, and after floundering two or three times got up, too, and kept his feet.

The next moment I had put my foot on the bar and swung myself up between their horns. I slid over the bar and was safe again on the outside. I was breathless, still, and panting, but safe; I had done the trick and could do it again. I had it to do two or three times that night; but I took jolly good care next time to look out for the steers' hind feet as well as their fore ones. I took the precaution, too, to keep my feet well apart in spite of the fact that the space was very restricted, and stand with about half my weight on each foot, so that if one was kicked from under me I should not lose my balance. I went in three or four times that night, whenever it was wanted, partly to accustom myself to it and secure my victory.

As we began watering the cattle in the morning I proposed to Bob to get inside to water them. He looked at me one moment, with his little, brown, gimlety eyes.

"You've been in, have you?" he demanded.

I nodded.

"Damn you!"

That was Bob's way of praising.

CHAPTER XV

BACK IN CHICAGO

All I got from Bob for copying him and divining his secrets was dislike and enmity. Up to the night when I entered the car and got the beasts up without his help, we had been great friends; afterwards we seemed to drift apart. He began, I think, to regard me as a rival, and was eager to oppose me in everything. The other men, too, appeared to draw away from me. I certainly got no credit for my achievement; but I contented myself with the reflection that at any rate I should get money for it, and that was something. When we reached Chicago, I found that my trainload was the only one that had not lost from ten to thirty head of cattle. Reece had only lost a few; but he had taken on a man in Kansas City to help, and had worked him pretty hard. We distributed the cattle over the great yards by the Michigan Central depot, and gave them over at a fixed charge per day to be fed, watered, and cared for.

The guardian of the yards was a blackavised Irishman, who seemed to take us all for Englishmen, and had nothing but scowls for our courtesy. I asked him why he

looked so cross, and he glowered at me with hot black eyes.

"I'll be cross or smilin', as I plaze, d'ye see? Ye needn't think ye can ride over us here in Amurrika, as ye used to do in Oireland; damn yez!"

There was bitter hatred in the man, flaming rage and hatred, unaccountable to me at the time; but when I met instance after instance of Celtic enmity, I began to devise explanations of it which turned out afterwards, for the most part, to be reasonable. At the time I simply shrugged my shoulders and left the man to his impotent malevolence.

Quite naturally Reece took his way to one of the best hotels; if I remember rightly, it was on Michigan Avenue; I know we had only to cross one street, and we were on the Lake Shore. The hotel at the time seemed to me excellent, though Reece declared that it was third-rate, and the wine undrinkable. Still, I thought it very comfortable, more than comfortable indeed, luxurious. I delighted in the morning bath, and perhaps more than anything else, in the clean, cool linen sheets and the white bread and butter.

After bathing and dressing as well as we could, we went to meet the others, and to determine whether we should sell our cattle or not. It was Thursday, I think, and the price offered was three cents a pound, which, for a very fat beast, would mean a price of perhaps forty dollars. I had four hundred head. Did that really mean that I should get sixteen thousand dollars? I was awestricken at the sum; but they told me that if I would wait a day or two I should get more. Three and a quarter cents, Reece said, was the least he would take, and a quarter of

a cent more, I argued to myself, would be twelve or fifteen hundred dollars, worth waiting for; but in the heart of me there was fear, I don't know why. I did not want to wait; I wanted to sell. Reece persuaded me not to by telling me that I had all my share of the costs to meet, and the proportion of the train expenses as well.

"I will make it out fairly," he said; "but I don't think you'll have more than ten or twelve thousand dollars, probably not that, when it's settled up."

It was a great fall; still, ten thousand dollars, as I told myself, were two thousand pounds, and would keep me a long time, and would bring my hopes nearer to fulfilment. I wished to sell; but I was a little ashamed of seeming too eager, so I said nothing at the time, but appeared to acquiesce in what the others had resolved.

"Two or three days' rest," said Reece, "will make up in weight what the cattle have lost on the train. I guess it'll pay us three times over in weight alone to keep them for three days, and I hear the markets east are booming. I am not going to sell a head under three and a quarter cents a pound, and only half of them at that."

After lunch, as Reece persisted in calling dinner, he took a siesta. We had always been accustomed to rest in the heat of the day, and though it was not nearly as hot in October in Chicago, as it had been in August and September on the plains, still the habit clung to the older men, and they all went off to their rooms and slept for an hour or two after the midday meal. With me it was different; habits are more easily formed in youth, or rather, are more easily thrown off, and the energetic, bustling life of Chicago drew me irresistibly. I wandered into the streets and down by the Lake Shore and out to the Park

by myself; but all the time the purpose was hardening in me; I would sell my cattle; I would sell every head. When we met at supper, or dinner, as Reece called it, I asked what I owed, and he made up the account to be three thousand six hundred dollars. I accepted it without a word, and only said—

"I hope you won't mind; but I want to sell my cattle to-morrow morning."

"Don't you be a fool, sonny," he replied; "I have been at this game before."

But I was obstinate, and shook my head.

"I am sure you are right," I said. "You may get more; but I want to feel I have ten thousand dollars in the bank. You see, I had only two thousand dollars when I went down on the trail, and to come back with a clean ten thousand in one season would be fine. I must get that. I am not greedy."

"That is just it," he replied. "You ought to be greedy. Believe me, the man who ain't greedy after dollars will want 'em badly before he dies. I guess you've got to be greedy of every cent. Of course, the sum's a big 'un for a youngster like you. I take enough interest in you to advise you to stick to the work; for you are a good hand with cattle already. I never heard of a train load before brought through and all in good condition, without a beast hurt. You must have kept at those cattle night and day."

I nodded.

"Well, the more reason," he went on, "that you should get every durned cent out of them there is to be got, every damned nickel. Yes, sir! Why should you give any of your money to those damned speculators here who are

making a fortune by sitting round on the rails chewing cigars and cheating us on prices? Not one hoof will I sell under three and a quarter cents a pound, and that'll be after the watering," he added.

I smiled; but my mind remained fixed.

"You don't mind my selling," I said, "do you? I should not like to do anything you did not wish. But, please, in this I want my own way."

Reece shrugged his shoulders and said no more.

I cannot tell what made me stubborn; but I know that I lay awake a good long time that night hugging myself with the idea of ten thousand dollars in the bank, or perhaps twelve, and calculating exactly how far towards my ambition that first round sum would bring me.

Next morning, when we went down to the cattle yards, prices had gone back; two and fifteen-sixteenths was all that was offered us, and I was cold with apprehension.

I felt inclined to sell at that; but prudence came to my help and whispered that I should wait and see. After my usual fashion, I went about the yards, and soon struck up an acquaintance with one or two Americans, particularly with the secretary who had charge of all the arrangements for selling fodder. I asked him about the price offered me; was it good or bad?

"Probably you will find to-morrow," he said, "that it has gone up the sixteenth; I should say that three cents or three cents and one-sixteenth was a fair price for your cattle. I have been looking at 'em, and yours are the pick of the lot. If I were you I'd stand out for three and one-sixteenth, if not three and an eighth; the price fluctuates all the time."

A little later I went in search of the man who had of-

fered me three cents the day before. I found him, and asked carelessly:

"Are you going to offer me three cents for my four hundred to-day?"

He said: "No, I ain't."

I pressed him, and at last he turned on me with the truth.

"You think a sixteenth nothing; we live on sixteenths. On one-sixteenth I make from twenty to fifty thousand dollars a year. I buy your cattle this morning at two and fifteen-sixteenths, and I wire through to New York, and they take 'em off my hands and give me three. There's my sixteenth, and your cattle don't remain with me an hour. That is what I call smart business, and I don't do anything else. Now, you are sharp enough to understand that!"

I hoped I was. He went on—

"You've got the ticker there in the office, and you can see the price as well as I can, and judge whether it's going up or down. It's nothing to me."

"Well," I said, "if it's nothing to you, are they going up or down, in your opinion?"

"I don't know," he said, "and I don't care. If you lived on the Lake Shore you'd give up betting whether one wave was coming in further than the next one. No sensible man likes gambling; it's silly. The sixteenth's my game, and that lets me sleep comfortably.

Every ten minutes or so I stole back and had a look at the ticker, and about three o'clock my spirits went up with a bound, for there, clearly marked, was the price, three to three and one-sixteenth. I rushed outside and found my friend and said:

"Here, they're three to three and one-sixteenth."

"Well, then," he replied, "I'll give you three cents a pound for your cattle."

"Done!" I cried.

"It's too late to drive 'em on to the scales to-night, ain't it?"

"No," I cried, "it isn't. I'll drive 'em on now."

"All right," he said, laughing, and wrote me out a formal purchase note.

We went round and weighed the cattle, and he told me he owed me sixteen thousand one hundred and eighty dollars. I knew that the Boss's lien and charges had to be met before the cattle could be moved, and told him. It was too late then to complete our business. We agreed to meet Monday morning and he would give me two checks —one check for three thousand six hundred dollars to pay the Boss's charges, and another check to myself for twelve thousand five hundred and eighty dollars.

It was an evening of happy memory. Reece told me I was very silly; but I went to bed and slept like a top. I have never been able to bargain in my life, and I have never regretted any settlement.

After some hours I was awakened by the smell of smoke.

Chicago was on fire!

CHAPTER XVI

FROM ASHES TO RICHES

I wish I could persuade myself that I was capable of picturing the events of the week after we reached Chicago.

On Saturday night the alarm bells began to ring and awoke me. I slipped into my breeches, shirt and boots and, a youthful curiosity exciting me, I raced down the stairs, got a horse from the stable and rode out to the fire. I was infinitely impressed by the rapidity with which the firemen acted and the marvelous efficiency of the service. Where in England there would have been perhaps half a dozen fire-engines, the Americans sent fifty, but they all found work and did it magnificently. At one o'clock the fire was out and I returned to the hotel through two or three miles of uninjured wooden streets. Of course, I told Reece and Ford all about it the next day. To my astonishment, no one seemed to pay much attention; a fire was so common a thing in the wooden shanties of the outskirts of American towns that nobody cared to listen to my epic.

Next night, Sunday, the alarm bell began ringing about eleven o'clock; I was still dressed in my best. I

changed into my working clothes, I do not know why, put my belt about me with a revolver in and again took out the mare and rode to the fire. When still a quarter of a mile away, I realized that this fire was much more serious than that of the previous night; first of all, a gale of wind was blowing right down on the town. Then, when I wondered why there were so few fire-engines, I was told that there were two other fires and the man with whom I talked did not scruple to ascribe them to a plot and determination to burn down the town! "Them damned foreign anarchists are at the bottom of it," he said; "three fires do not start on the very outskirts of the town with a gale of wind blowing, without some reason."

And indeed, it looked as if he were right. In spite of all the firemen could do, the fire spread with incredible rapidity. In half an hour I saw they were not going to master it soon or easily and I rode back to get Reece, who had told me that he would come with me the previous night if he had known where the fire was. When I got back to the hotel, Reece had gone out on his own and so had the Boss. I went back to the fire. It had caught on in the most extraordinary way. The wooden streets now were all blazing; the fire was swallowing block after black and the heat was so tremendous that the fire-engines could not get within two hundred yards of the blaze. The roar of the fire was unearthly.

Another thing I noticed almost immediately: the heat was so terrific that the water decomposed into its elements and the oxygen gas in the water burned vehemently on its own account. The water, in fact, added fuel to the flames. As soon as I made sure of this, I saw that

the town was doomed and walked my pony back a block or two to avoid flying sparks.

This must have been about three or four o'clock in the morning. I had gone back about three blocks when I came across a man talking to a group of men at the corner of a street. He was the one man of insight and sense I met that night. He seemed to me a typical, down-east Yankee; he certainly talked like one. The gist of his speech was as follows:

"I want you men to come with me right now to the Mayor and tell him to give orders to blow up at least two blocks deep all along this side of the town; then, if we drench the houses on the other side, the flames will be stopped; there's no other way."

"That's sense," I cried, "that's what ought to be done at once. There's no other way of salvation; for the heat is disintegrating the water and the oxygen in the water is blazing fiercely, adding fuel to the flames."

"Gee! that's what I have been preaching for the last hour," he cried.

A little later fifty or sixty citizens went to the Mayor, but he protested that he had no power to blow up houses and evidently, too, shirked the responsibility. He decided, however, to call in some of the councilmen and see what could be done. Meanwhile I went off and wandered towards the Randolph Street bridge and there saw a scene that appalled me.

Some men had caught a thief, they said, plundering one of the houses and they proceeded to string the poor wretch up to a lamp-post.

In vain I pleaded for his life, declared that he ought to be tried, that it was better to let off ten guilty men than

hang one innocent one, but my foreign accent robbed my appeal, I think, of any weight and before my eyes the man was strung up. It filled me with rage; it seemed to me a dreadful thing to have done; the cruelty of the executioners, the hard purpose of them, shut me away from my kin. Later I was to see these men from a better angle.

By the early morning the fire had destroyed over a mile deep of the town and was raging with unimaginable fury. I went down on the lake shore just before daybreak. The scene was one of terrifying magnificence; there were probably a hundred and fifty thousand homeless men, women and children grouped along the lake shore. Behind us roared the fire; it spread like a red sheet right up to the zenith above our heads, and from there was borne over the sky in front of us by long streamers of fire like rockets; vessels four hundred yards out in the bay were burning fiercely, and we were, so to speak, roofed and walled by flame. The danger and uproar were indeed terrifying and the heat, even in this October night, almost unbearable.

I wandered along the lake shore, noting the kind way in which the men took care of the women and children. Nearly every man was able to erect some sort of shelter for his wife and babies, and every one was willing to help his neighbor. While working at one shelter for a little while, I said to the man, I wished I could get a drink.

"You can get one," he said, "right there," and he pointed to a sort of makeshift shanty on the beach. I went over and found that a publican had managed to get four barrels down on the beach and had rigged up a sort of low tent above them; on one of the barrels he had nailed his shingle, and painted on it were the words,

"What do you think of our hell? No drinks less than a dollar!" The wild humor of the thing amused me infinitely and the man certainly did a roaring trade.

A little later it occurred to me that our cattle might possibly burn, so I went out and hurried back to the Michigan stockyards. The old Irishman was in charge of the yard, but though he knew me perfectly well, he refused to let me take out a steer. The cattle were moving about wildly, evidently in a state of intense excitement. I pleaded with the man and begged him, and at length tied my mare up to the lamp-post at the corner and went back and got into the stockyard when he wasn't looking. I let down two or three of the bars and the next moment started the cattle through the opening. They went crazy wild and choked the gateway. In five minutes there were ten or twelve dead cattle in the entrance and the rest had to go over them. Suddenly, just as I got through the gap, the mad beasts made a rush and carried away the rails on both sides of the gateway. The next moment I was knocked down and I had just time to drag myself through the fence and so avoid their myriad trampling heels.

A few minutes later, I was on my cow pony trying to get the cattle out of the town and on to the prairie. The herd broke up at almost every corner but I managed to get about six hundred head right out into the country.

I drove them on the dead run for some miles. By this time it was daybreak and at the second or third farmhouse I came to, I found a farmer willing to take in the cattle. I bargained with him a little and at length told him I would give him a dollar a head if he kept them for the week or so we might want to leave them with him. In two minutes he brought out his son and an Irish helper

and turned the cattle back and into his pasture. There were six hundred and seventy-six of them, as near as I could count, out of practically two thousand head.

By the time I had finished the business and returned to the hotel, it was almost noon and as I could get nothing to eat I wandered out again to see the progress of the fire. Already I found that relief trains were being sent in with food from all neighboring towns and this was the feature of the next week in starving Chicago.

Strangely enough, at that time the idea was generally accepted that a man or woman could only live three days without food. It was years before Dr. Tanner showed the world that a man could fast for forty days or more. Every one I met acted as if he believed that if he were fully three days without food, he must die incontinently. I laughed at the idea which seemed to me absurd, but so strong was the universal opinion and the influence of the herd-sentiment, that on the third day I too felt particularly empty and thought I had better take my place in the bread line. There were perhaps five thousand in front of me and there were soon fifty or sixty thousand behind me. We were five deep moving to the depot where the bread trains were discharging, one after the other. When I got pretty close to the food wagons, I noticed that the food supply was coming to an end, and the next moment I noticed something else.

Again and again women and girls came into our bread line and walked through the lines of waiting men, who, mark you, really believed they were going to die that night if they could not get food, but instead of objecting they one and all made way for the women and girls and encouraged them: "Go right on, Madam, take all you

want"; "This way, Missee, you won't be able to carry much, I'm afraid";—proof on proof, it seemed to me, of courage, good humor and high self-abnegation so much better than the "manhood" displayed in a mob lynching one of their fellow-men.

I went into that bread line an Irish boy and came out of it a proud American. The courage shown by the common people in the fire, the wild humor coupled with the consideration for the women, had won my heart. This is the greatest people in the world, I said to myself, and was proud to feel at one with them.

But I did not get any bread that night or the next. In fact, my first meal was made when I ran across Reece on the Friday or Saturday after; Reece, as usual, had fallen on his feet and found a hotel where they had provisions—though at famine prices.

He insisted that I should come with him and soon got me my first meal. In return, I told him and Ford of the cattle I had saved. They were, of course, delighted and determined next day to come out and retrieve them. "One thing is certain," said Ford, "six hundred head of cattle are worth as much to-day in Chicago as fifteen hundred head were worth before the fire, so we hain't lost much."

Next day I led Reece and the Boss straight to the farmer's place, but to my surprise he told me that I had agreed to give him two dollars a head, whereas I had bargained with him for only one dollar. His son backed up the farmer's statement and the Irish helper declared that he was sorry to disagree with me, but I was mistaken: it was two dollars I had said. They little knew the sort of men they had to deal with. "Where are the cattle?" Ford

asked, and we went down to the pasture where they were penned. "Count them, Harris," said Ford, and I counted six hundred and twenty head. Fifty odd had disappeared, but the farmer wanted to persuade me that I had counted wrongly.

Ford went about and soon found a rough lean-to stable where there were thirty more head of Texan cattle. These were driven up and soon disappeared in the herd; Reece and I began to move the herd towards the entrance. The farmer declared he would not let us go, but Ford looked at him a little while and then said very quietly, "You have stolen enough cattle to pay you. If you bother with us, I will make meat of you—see! cold meat." The farmer moved aside with unusual haste, I thought.

That night we had a great feast and the day after Ford announced that he had sold the whole of the cattle to two hotel proprietors and got nearly as much money as if we had not lost a hoof.

My adventure had ended in three thousand dollars being turned into more than twelve thousand in a year. Had I been enriched in other ways as well? I believe so. My year on the Trail had marked my very being. It had made a workman of me and, above all, had taught me that tense resolution, will power, was the most important factor in life. I made up my mind to train my will by exercise as I would train a muscle and each day I proposed to test myself anew.

I had noticed a French saying that intensified my decision: *"Celui qui veut, celiu-là peut."* "He who wills, can." My mind should govern me, not my appetites, I decided. That was the biggest lesson I learned from the

open range and I have profited by it for more than fifty years.

I quit cow-punching and with my profits went to college; not to Cambridge or Oxford, where years before it had been decided I should go, but to the University of Kansas and after that to Heidelberg. So equipped, I set out to win my way in the Old World as my masters of the open range had taught to conquer the hardships of the New.

Honors and infamy have been heaped on me in the years between, but those days in the West had taught me to take them both with a degree of amused indifference. So, full of loving-kindness for enemies and friends alike, and happiest most of all for this opportunity to record what those boyhood years in America have meant to me, I come to the end of my story of life on the trail.

THE END

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